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# *Mireille's* Homecoming? Gounod, Mistral, and the Midi

KATHARINE ELLIS

First published in Avignon in February 1859, Frédéric Mistral's Provençal manifesto, the pastoral epic *Mirèio*, reached the operatic stage in just five years, on 19 March 1864, courtesy of Michel Carré and Charles Gounod. For an opera on a near-contemporary subject, this was exceptional—as indeed was the presence of peasant protagonists in the tragedy of a wealthy farmer's daughter who defies parental rejection of her impecunious basketweaver lover Vincent; journeys west across the stony Crau desert to find solace at the church of Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer after Vincent is injured by Ourrias, her approved suitor; and dies of sunstroke in the attempt. But the nature of Mistral's poem as a call to revalorize the cultures of the Midi—which included all the areas of southern France in which versions of Occitan, the “Langue d'Oc,” were spoken—made it even more unusual. Published with parallel columns in Provençal and French, it challenged the centralization characteristic of the French state since the Revolution of 1789 via an appeal to regionalism: the preservation and celebration of traditional forms of local identity, and the invention of new ones.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, that appeal was presented in operatic guise at the Théâtre-Lyrique, one of the capital's national, subsidized, stages.<sup>2</sup> In 1859, Alphonse de Lamartine's gushing if primitivizing appraisal of Mistral's original as Homeric epic had conferred instant Parisian

I am immensely grateful to the British Academy for funding fieldwork on this project via its BARDA scheme, 2009–10. Thanks are also due to those who offered feedback after seminar presentations in Montréal, London, Southampton, Canterbury, and Milton Keynes, and to my anonymous readers. Among librarians, Mme Anna Puech at the Bibliothèque municipale, Nîmes, and Mme Sabine Barnicaud at the Palais du Roure, Avignon, went out of their way to help, as, in Marseille, did Mme Gertrude Cendo at the Archives municipales and staff at the Bibliothèque de l'Alcazar. A selection of primary texts from this project is available on open access as part of “Francophone Music Criticism, 1789–1914” at <http://www.music.sas.ac.uk/fmc>.

1. The musicological literature on French regionalism is still limited, and has tended to focus on music written from around 1890 onwards by campaigners such as Déodat de Séverac (Midi) or Guy Ropartz and Jean Cras (Brittany), these being among the French regions with the most acute linguistic and cultural self-perceptions of difference from Paris. See, for Brittany, Le Moigne-Mussat, *Musique et société*, 359–72, and Bempéchat, *Jean Cras*; and for the Midi, Musk, *Aspects of Regionalism*, idem, “Regionalism, latinité,” and Waters, *Déodat de Séverac*.

2. The best musicological account of the opera's genesis and subsequent revision remains that of Steven Huebner, *Operas of Charles Gounod*, 68–72 and 133–54.

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celebrity on *Mirèio* and its young author, and instant topicality on the regionalist question.<sup>3</sup> Gounod's operatic setting catalyzed a second wave of debate on the value of regional difference in general, and of Mistral's lyrical defense of local customs and identity in particular, with the result that the opera's fidelity or lack thereof to the vision of the activist poet came under especially close scrutiny. For various reasons, it failed this rather unusually rigorous test of "verisimilitude": those *Méridionaux* who attended the premiere expecting Mistral's evocations of their older rural cousins to come to life beyond the footlights were doomed to a disappointment that still resonates in respect of modern productions. Certainly, such expectation lies at the heart of a long-standing tradition of writing about the existence of "two Mireilles"—Mistral's and Gounod's—and of pitting the real against the more or less false.

This real-false binary played a key role in the reception and production of Gounod's opera not only at its Parisian premiere but also from 1865 when it made its way to Provence, providing a contextual framework that is of significant interest for the study of regionalism in music. In particular, in 1899, six years after Gounod's death, the opera unexpectedly became a focal point for regionalist celebration in the South of France. It also, in a paradoxical sense, came "home" to Arles—the regional capital that Mistral's peasant heroine had been told about but had never seen for herself. However, in the process *Mireille* was transformed to suit its new performative context. The resulting invented tradition, which rested on standard notions of authenticity and belonging, proved tenacious; but it was also both problematic and unstable, and not helped by the very different but parallel life that *Mireille* led elsewhere in the Midi as a standard "municipal" *opéra comique* born and raised in Paris. And while one might envisage similar tensions between the real and the false (or the authentic and the inauthentic) operating in the case of any "exotic" opera returned ceremoniously to its homeland, *Mireille* is special not only because it constitutes an "internal exotic" rather than one of international power relations or foreign cultures, but also because it rises from the exotic margin itself, the source of its libretto being a regionalist leader's call to arms and not the product of an outsider's orientaling gaze.<sup>4</sup> In a valuable essay of 1993, Jean-Max Guieu, a Provençal specialist in French Studies, tried to redress the balance of criticism in Gounod's favor, not least by foregrounding the hair-trigger sensitivity of nineteenth-century *Méridionaux* to anything that tampered with the sacred Mistral original. But in dismissing *Mireille* as an utter failure in the South of France—not only on its arrival in Marseille in 1865 but

3. Lamartine, "Littérature villageoise."

4. In this respect *Mireille* is also distinct from works authored directly or indirectly by an insider such Alphonse Daudet, writing in French alone (Bizet's *L'Arlésienne* and Massenet's *Sapho* respectively). The orientaling gaze is epitomized in Mérimée's *Carmen* or Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysanthème*. On the "exotic brought home," the case of the latter is discussed in meticulous detail by Arthur Groos in "Return of the Native." Thanks to Roger Parker for pointing me towards this article.

when revived as festival material in Arles in 1909 and Saint-Rémy-de-Provence in 1913—he streamlined the work's trajectory in ways that closed off valuable routes for cultural analysis. He left unacknowledged its status as a repertory opera in the Midi from the 1880s, and, in omitting discussion of the 1899 festival in Arles, underestimated how close *Mireille* came to full assimilation as a regionalist statement over the fifteen years to 1914. Finally, he underplayed the active participation of Mistral and his loyal circle of disciples (who called themselves *félibres*) in its reconfiguration.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly I tread some of the same ground here, from a new perspective. I, too, analyze the “municipal” trajectory from the moment when Gounod's opera, savagely cut at its December 1864 rerun in Paris, reached the Grand-Théâtre in Marseille (29 December 1865), but after a brief consideration of the work's later “municipal” life I then fast-forward not to 1909, but to 14 May 1899, when the opera was first appropriated in Arles as a festival celebration of *félibrige* achievement and traditions, and as an attempted official consecration of Mireille the “Arlésienne.”

Ironies abound here. Mistral's Mirèio did not know her own regional capital of Arles: in chant VIII of the poem she had to be told, by little Andreoun the snail collector, just how great and beautiful and fertile were the town and its environs. But the Carré/Gounod Mireille knew the town well: it was in the shadow of its huge Roman Arena (see Fig. 1) that she spent the entirety of act 2—watching the farandoleurs, declaring her love for the lowly Vincent in the famous “Chanson de Magali” duet, and defying her father's insistence that she marry according to her relatively high station. In operatic terms the Arena gave the opera its visual passport as Provençal; it also ensured a variety of backdrops for the opera as a whole, rendered Ramon's humiliation of his daughter all the more dramatic for taking place in public, and on a practical level facilitated the act 2 finale's buildup of characters—a gathering that would have been incongruous in Mistral's private, interior, setting of the Crau farmhouse. That said, the libretto does undoubted violence to Mistral's original by transferring act 2 to a spectacular location that plays no part in the poem, and it continues to be roundly condemned in the Midi because the change of location constitutes an affront to Provençal civility (the public/private problem), misrepresents Mireille's identity, and travesties Mistral. The Mistral scholar Claude Mauron has been especially trenchant on the latter two points, writing in 1999: “Neither by virtue of her home, nor her family, nor by the serendipity of her travels, is Mireille an Arlésienne in Mistral's work. By contrast, the opera put together by Carré and Gounod transferred from the Crau farmhouse to the Arles Arena the main scenes of chants III, IV, and VII, thereby crassly destroying a separation that the poem was careful to establish.”<sup>6</sup>

5. Guieu, “*Mirèio* and *Mireille*.” Mistral's *Félibrige* was founded in 1854 as an association for the promotion of the Provençal language as a respected literary medium.

6. “Ni par son domicile, ni par sa famille, ni par le hasard de ses pas, Mireille n'est une Arlésienne, chez Mistral. Par contre, l'opéra concocté par MM. Carré et Gounod transférerait du



**Figure 1** Auguste Lamy, “Les arènes d’Arles.” Colored lithograph evoking the première of *Mireille*. Collection Bibliothèque nationale de France, Bibl.-Musée de l’Opéra, scènes—Estampes Auguste Lamy. Used with permission of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Nevertheless, Arles and Mistral’s heroine are indissolubly linked, and it was Mistral himself who ensured that the connection, once established, would endure. The cover of the very volume in which Mauron’s statement appeared says it all. Entitled *Arlésienne: Le mythe?*, it documented the centenary exhibition of the ethnographic museum Mistral founded in Arles, and it featured the sculpture of Mirèio, suffering her fatal sunstroke, that was commissioned from Antonin Mercié in 1913 and unveiled at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer seven years later. Moreover, we can detect something of the power of the way the opera served to bond *Mireille* and Arles in the bafflement of New York critic George Loomis on finding the opera’s famous Arena backdrop (act 2) replaced for the Palais Garnier production of September 2009 by a repeat of the act 1 cornfields—a setting rather closer to Mistral than to Carré.<sup>7</sup> Would Mistral

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mas de Crau aux arènes d’Arles les scènes principales des chants III, IV et VII, abolissant ainsi bêtement une distance que le poème s’était appliqué à définir . . .” [dots original]; Mauron, “Mireille et les Arlésiennes,” 96. In a lecture-recital of 1 October 2009 at the Bibliothèque de l’Alcazar, Marseille, the *félibre* Michel Fournier expressed a similar view.

7. “Décor by the veteran team of Ezio Frigerio and Franca Squarciapino, known for their lavish traditional designs, is oddly simple; in lieu of the Arles arena, the act 1 setting of an open field

have approved of this “return” of act 2 from town to country? I suspect not: he would have lamented a missed opportunity. For as the result of an accident of entrepreneurship it was within the very Roman arena featured in the opera that Gounod's *Mireille* underwent a selective ethnographic overhaul which Mistral, after initial reluctance, actively encouraged. That overhaul cemented in the popular imagination the idea of Mistral's heroine as the archetypal “girl from Arles”—the legendary “Arlésienne” in whose footsteps true Provençal women were to follow. Here, the festivals of 14 May 1899 and 31 May 1909 celebrating major anniversaries of *Mirèio* were held, with the late Gounod's *Mireille* as their artistic vehicle; at Arles, too, the elderly Mistral, who was artless about his penchant for pretty girls, inaugurated the initiation rite of massed Arlésiennes—the *Feste vierginenco*—in 1903.<sup>8</sup> The two streams reached a confluence in the Arles *Mireille* of 12 July 1914, held shortly after Mistral's death and at which the opera was sung in Provençal (see Fig. 2). In addition, the playwright Alphonse Daudet, author of *L'Arlésienne*, was celebrated on 18 June 1899 in a Nîmes Arena performance repeating that of Arles the previous month; and Gounod received his own commemoration via an open-air performance at Saint-Rémy-de-Provence on 7 September 1913.<sup>9</sup>

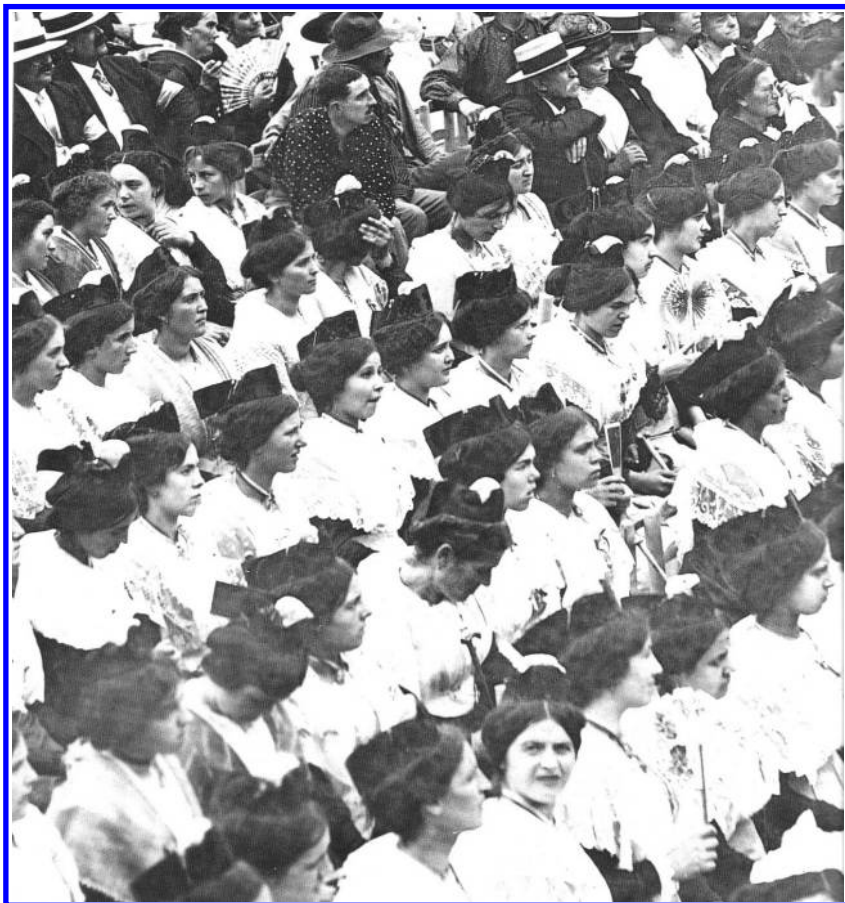
A good few questions here merit close analysis if we are to understand the signification of Mistral's festival performances of *Mireille*. The first is a negative one, involving the intersection of regional politics and a sense of musical place: why did performances at Marseille not provide a “homecoming” for the work as early as 1865? (The city was after all operationally preeminent within the region and close to the heartlands of Provence. It was even the home town of the very first *Mireille*, Caroline Miolan-Carvalho.) The second involves the idea of opera as ritual: what are we to make of the functional differences between *Mireille* as a municipal opera and as a festival opera, and how do those differences feed into debates about the opera's regionalist legitimacy and influence? The third forms the study's core. By means of a broadly chronological exploration of festival performances, I ask by what mechanisms the “festival” *Mireille* was appropriated for the *fêlibrige* cause from 1899

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at harvest time serves once again”; Loomis, “Gounod's *Mireille*,” *New York Times*, 22 September 2009. Production, with Inva Mula as Mireille, Charles Castronovo as Vincent, and Marc Minkowski conducting. Opéra National de Paris DVD frA: FRA002 (2010).

8. A graduation ceremony for women who had kept local traditions for two years. Each woman, in full local dress, processed to a Mass held in Provençal, followed by a ceremony at which she would take an oath and be awarded a diploma with medal. Sources also give *Festo* or *Fèsto*.

9. Other performances pepper the arenas of the Midi, but those of 1899, 1909, 1913, and 1914 are the most culturally important because of their celebratory, public nature and their close connections to Gounod, Mistral, and Mistral's widow. Nevertheless, detailed information on a further 1899 performance, on 20 August at the private Arènes de [Jean] Chomel in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, remains elusive.



**Figure 2** “Les jeunes filles des environs d’Arles, en costumes de Mireilles, aux Arènes pour la Fête Vierginenco,” 12 July 1914. *La farandole*, 3e année, no. 92 (21 July 1914): 6–7 (detail). Photographer unknown. Used with permission of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

onwards, and probe the implications of those mechanisms—relating to costume, environment, memory, music, dance, scenery, and language—for our understanding of regionalism’s relationship to cultural nationalism more generally. Finally, in the closing pages of the article, and on the basis of asides and allusions within contemporary sources, I query a keenly felt sense of absence and “wrong fit” in the *Mireille* reception history of the period, and suggest an alternative ideal for a composer of Provençal national music in the nineteenth century—one whose distinctive compositional response to a Provençal narrative helps explain in more overtly musical terms the cultural challenges Gounod’s score had to surmount.

For two reasons, invoking nationalism here might seem out of place. I do not mean to imply either that Gounod’s opera became part of a campaign of



Provençal political separatism or that it was touted in centralist vein as the quintessence of Frenchness. Rather, I use the term in the manner of European Studies scholar Joep Leerssen, because the characteristics of *Mireille's* festival performances from 1899 align closely with the pan-European symptoms of cultural nationalism that provide the necessary underpinning for political nationalism, and which Leerssen developed into a matrix of interrelated indicators that presents an ostensibly ideal hermeneutic context for *Mireille* as “national music” (Fig. 3).<sup>10</sup> Music itself is ubiquitous, appearing at each stage of the renewal and dissemination process and participating in its culmination as “revived or invented traditions” (cell P3). However, focusing on “music” alone misses the point.

The manner in which nonmusical elements served to frame the opera, which was itself the culmination of each festival, enabled the work to gain nationalist import by association with a constellation of identity-building elements. They include the inauguration of statues of Mistral (cell A3: Arles 1909) and Gounod (A3: Saint-Rémy-de-Provence 1913), a costume ball evoking olden times (D3: Arles 1899, 1909), a museum-opening and extension (A2, I: Arles 1899, 1909) and an initiation rite (P3: Arles, 1903–1914). Infra-structural support came from the pyramidal structure of the *félibrige* movement itself, with its local associations and schools, through the new Arles museum and through writings about the festivals in the form of pamphlets and periodical articles within and beyond the *félibrige* press (S). Nevertheless, much identity building could be accomplished within the performances themselves: national poetry (L3, D2, P2: Mistral, and odes from local poets), commemorations (D3: Mistral, Gounod and, for Nîmes 1899, Daudet), symbolically invested sites (A1: the Arles Arena itself), manners and customs (P1: women's dress, not least because of the tradition of viewing the Arena audience as part of the spectacle),<sup>11</sup> folk music and dance (P1: farandoles especially), and linguistic purism (L2: translation into Provençal) all contribute. And Gounod's music? Herein lies the precious grit in the oyster. For what makes *Mireille* such an eloquent cultural indicator in this context is that even in its festival context it struggles to gain acceptance as “national music” (P2) in the Midi, and accordingly we encounter obstacles, accommodations, and debates that enable glimpses into the assumptions behind, and foundations of, musical nationalism.

10. Leerssen, “Nationalism,” 572. Thanks to Elinor Shaffer for pointing me to this work. As Leerssen himself indicates, the fact that political nationalism did not emerge in Provence with enough force to trigger secession does not undermine the analysis; the symptoms of regionalism are identical; *ibid.*, 563–64.

11. This tradition of conflation began in 1899 in part because of the numbers of *félibrige* women who attended the *Mireille* performance in Provençal dress. Elzéard Rougier described them as each “to an extent attending her own apotheosis” (*assister un peu à sa propre apothéose*). *Petit Marseillais*, 15 May 1899, 2.

	SALVAGE, RETRIEVAL, INVENTORY	FRESH CULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY	PROPAGATION, PROCLAMATION IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE
<b>LANGUAGE</b>	Dictionaries Grammars	Orthography debates Standardization / dialect debates Language purism	Language activism Language planning Language education
<b>DISCOURSE</b>	L1 Editions of older - literary texts - historical documents - legal sources	L2 Translations / adaptations (Bible, classics) National / historical drama, novel, poetry National history-writing Literary history, criticism	L3 History education Historical pageants Commemorations Events / festivals / awards
<b>MATERIAL CULTURE, ARTEFACTS</b>	D1 Archeography Monumental remains Symbolically invested sites	D2 Monument protection policy Historicist architecture, design Restorations, museums	D3 Monuments Dedication of public spaces
<b>CULTURAL PERFORMANCES, PRACTICES</b>	A1 Editions of oral literature Proverbs, superstitions Pastimes, folklore Manners and customs Folk dances, folk music	A2 Rustic-realist literature Traditional sports / pastimes revived National music composed	A3 Revived or invented traditions Events / festivals / awards (folklore, sports, music)
<b>SOCIAL AMBIENCE INSTITUTIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE</b>	P1 Associations, congresses, academies; publishing ventures, reading societies, book clubs, periodicals Universities / chairs, libraries, archives, state museums, state academies, government agencies	P2	P3 S I

Figure 3 Joep Leerssen, A matrix coordinating aspects of the cultivation of culture in nationalism. From Leerssen, "Nationalism and the Cultivation of Culture," 572.

## Paris, 1864: A Difficult Birth

To cast an eye briefly at the opera's first reception is instructive. The Paris reviews of Spring 1864 are decidedly mixed. On the authenticity question critics from Provence and the South are generally more demanding than others. Moreover, while the inappropriateness of the Théâtre-Lyrique's all-purpose peasant costumes was compounded by the fact that Miolan-Carvalho looked as though she were still playing Gounod's Marguerite, the composer's treatment of an already suspect libretto understandably came under scrutiny from the same point of view. How "Parisian" or "Provençal" was it, and should it have been otherwise? To gloss the responses *in extenso* would rapidly provide diminishing returns, since the crucial point is that, rightly or wrongly (and as we shall see, Guieu's research suggests the latter), none of the critical heavyweights writing from the capital seems to have detected in the work anything beyond standard lip service to *couleur locale*. Those who wished to slight Gounod would compare his mulberry pickers to seamstresses picnicking in the Forêt de Saint-Germain,<sup>12</sup> or portray the music in general as too elevated and gilded—placing the emphasis firmly on plush interiors rather than rocky expanses framed by sky and sea.<sup>13</sup> The "real" and "false" binary I mention above is essentialized in an important insider's review by the Cavaillon-born critic Joseph d'Ortigue, who in a piece that gained additional authority through being reprinted in his native area of the Lubéron (eastern Provence), deliberately gives his readers a very different plotline from that of the libretto. The only critic of 1864 whom I have found writing from an openly Provençal perspective, d'Ortigue also explained precisely why the poem set his heart pounding, comparing the artificiality of Paris (where he was currently working) with the "true" (*vraie*) life of rural France which Mistral had so poignantly conjured up: "not the artificial life of those who require to be deafened in the whirlwind of capital cities, but the true life, the only one about which one has no regrets except at the moment when one has to leave it to enter into another" (*non pas la vie factice de ceux qui ont besoin de s'étourdir dans le tourbillon des capitales, mais la vraie vie, la seule qu'on ne regrette pas [sic] à l'instant où il faut la quitter pour entrer dans une autre*).<sup>14</sup> Mistral, he told Parisians, portrayed "us"; Gounod did not. A version of the same real/artificial dichotomy also appears in the review by Bénédict (Benoît) Jouvin of Grenoble, who described Carré as having been forced by theatrical convention to take a machete to the virgin forest of the poem in order to create dramatic

12. Alexis Azevedo, from Bordeaux, in *L'opinion nationale*, 30 March 1864, in Galland, *Dossier*, 162.

13. Marie Escudier, from Castelnaudary (Languedoc), in *La France musicale*, 20 March 1864, in Galland, *Dossier*, 18.

14. D'Ortigue in *Journal des débats*, 30 March 1864, in Galland, *Dossier*, 143. Reprinted in the *Écho du Lubéron* from 6 April 1864.

momentum out of it;<sup>15</sup> and it is equally explicit in Paul Scudo's *Revue des deux mondes* review, where the blame for inauthenticity falls squarely on Gounod because the fault lies more in character (Parisian music) than in plot.<sup>16</sup>

It made no difference that Gounod had been welcomed to Provence by Mistral, had stayed in Saint-Rémy, and had sketched much of the work while on walks in the area. These marks of sensitivity to local distinctiveness, which were well known, could also be turned against him at will: despite his operatic evocations of the traditional fife (*gaboulet*) and drum (*tambourin*) in Provençal music, he had listened but not heard. Significantly, d'Ortigue was among the harshest voices here. Gounod had, via through-composition, provided an overengineered response to the traditional strophes of Mistral's "Chanson de Magali" (act 2) and had apparently ignored the tune preferred by the poet, just as he had ignored a host of folk tunes that could have been jotted down verbatim or taken from the carols of poet and composer Nicolas Saboly via volumes compiled by François Seguin.<sup>17</sup> Mistral himself, who remained publicly supportive of Gounod's opera (as originally conceived) for the next fifty years, apparently offered just a single adverse comment which could apply to choreography, or music, or both: he found in act 2 "a strange ballet masquerading as a farandole" (un ballet étrange en guise de farandoul).<sup>18</sup> In addition, those who knew about Provençal costume, or who took the trouble to find out, complained about the casual ignorance with which matters of local dress had been interpreted.<sup>19</sup>

15. "M. Michel Carré, obligé d'aller au dénouement par la ligne droite [. . .] est entré dans la fiction de M. Frédéric Mistral comme un bûcheron entrerait dans une forêt vierge du Nouveau-Monde,—à coups de hache." (*Le Figaro*, 27 March 1864, in Galland, *Dossier*, 95).

16. *Revue des deux mondes*, 15 April 1864, in Galland, *Dossier*, 202–6.

17. Joseph d'Ortigue in *Journal des débats*, 30 March 1864, in Galland, *Dossier*, 151–52. D'Ortigue, who mentions the tunes of the era of the "Roi René" (1409–1480) is doubtless referring to Seguin's editions of Saboly's Provençal carols, published in Avignon in 1856. It was also Seguin whose piano-accompanied transcription of the "Chanson de Magali," which presents Mistral's preferred tune, was published in the first edition of *Mirèio* (pp. 509–11). It was followed by an alternative setting composed in folk style by another musical regionalist, the Carpentras watercolorist and antiquarian Jean-Jules-Bonaventure Laurens (pp. 513–14). As far as d'Ortigue is concerned, the only Provençal melody Gounod uses is the 'Cantique de San-Gen' of the religious procession opening act 5; Galland, *Dossier*, 153.

18. Undated letter to fellow *fêlibre* Joseph Roumanille, written shortly before the 19 March premiere: Bibl. Municipale d'Avignon, Ms 6042, fol. 335v. It is indeed odd that Gounod should have written a designated "farandole" in 4/4 rather than in the customary 6/8. Nevertheless, on several occasions Mistral stressed the extent to which Gounod had understood the essence of his poem, a late example being a note of condolence to Gounod's son Jean on the death in 1906 of his mother, in which he described Gounod as having "pursued and attained the ideal of *Mirèio*" (poursuivait et atteignait l'idéal de *Mirèio*) while working in the Alpilles. Cited in Charles-Roux, *Le jubilé de Mistral*, 266.

19. E.g., Bénédict [Benoît] Jouvin, *Le Figaro*, 27 March 1864; D'Ortigue, *Journal des débats*, 30 March 1864; Alexis Azevedo, *L'opinion nationale*, 30 March 1864; H. L. d'Aubel, *La musique populaire*, 1 April 1864, in Galland, *Dossier*, 105, 153, 167, 173.

On a more general level, the vast majority of Paris critics agreed on the fact that the opera was undramatic. It was too long for its peasant subject matter, too orchestral or “descriptive,” and too static. A twenty-first-century critic might opine that as such it translated the rhythm and pace of Mistral’s epic rather well; but the expectations of critics of 1864 meant that such observations spelled—in the worst sense—an anti-operatic work. Metaphors of album leaves and of “hors d’œuvres” ensured that the perceived emotional register of Gounod’s opera was restricted to that of the pretty or picturesque.<sup>20</sup> At the same time Gounod attracted accusations of either Wagnerian idolatry or expressive flabbiness, or both, in the central (act 3) scenes of suspense and dramatic action: the fight between Vincent and Ourrias in Hell’s Valley, the latter’s subsequent remorse, and his drowning in the river Rhône.<sup>21</sup> Since the reworked *Tannhäuser* had failed so spectacularly at the Paris Opéra just three years earlier amid near-paranoia about the threat his Germanic music represented to French tradition, these criticisms piled irony onto irony, since the scenes to which they referred were all steeped in Provençal legend. All such ironies reinforce the impression of the work’s dissonance *via-à-vis* generic expectations, explaining the imperative to standardize it, not just for Paris but also internationally, as an *opéra-comique*. The short-term result is well known, and Gounod has not been thanked for it. By December 1864, *Mireille* was a shadow of her former self. Reduced from five acts to three, with the Hell’s Valley, Rhône and Crau scenes, and even the act 2 harvest chorus removed for practical reasons and in response to criticism, the work instead sported the coloratura waltz “Légère hirondelle” (demanded by Miolan-Carvalho, and entirely out of character for a fifteen-year-old peasant girl, however wealthy), a new love duet in act 3, and a happy choral ending. *Mireille* lost all the darkness of its original passage from light to dark to light. Save for a brief interval in 1874 at the Opéra-Comique, at every Paris performance between December 1864 and 1901 she recovered miraculously from her sunstroke at the opera’s close to embrace the happy prospect of marriage to her beloved basket-weaver Vincent. Crucially, with the downgrading of the parts for both Vincent (initially because of a weak tenor, François Morini) and Ourrias (Paris audiences had tended to leave the hall *en masse* during act 3),<sup>22</sup> she also became the sole principal in the opera.

20. Léon Escudier adopts the former description (*L’art musical*, 24 March 1864); Alexis Azevedo used the latter as a mantra accompanying analysis of the music (*Opinion nationale*, 30 March 1864), both in Galland, *Dossier*, 58, 158–59.

21. E.g., Marie Escudier, *La France musicale*, 20 March 1864; Léon Escudier, *L’art musical*, 24 March 1864; Bénédic [Benoît] Jouvin, *Le Figaro*, 27 March 1864, in Galland, *Dossier*, 16–17, 59, 101.

22. As reported by the Marseille writer T. Mirevelt, who had attended five Théâtre-Lyrique performances and wrote an extremely supportive review for the opening issue of the city’s bi-monthly arts journal, *La voie nouvelle*, 1 January 1866, 25–29, at 27–28.

Thus revised, *Mireille* was released for regional use. Nestor Roqueplan (who was unusual in that although he came from the Midi he thoroughly approved of the opera) had in March bestowed on Gounod the unfortunate compliment that in setting *Mireille* the composer had given Mistral's poem the "universality of musical language" (l'universalité du langage musical).<sup>23</sup> Within the limits of the term "universality" in the 1860s, that, certainly, was the intention behind the cuts and additions. Such unwitting testimony is rich, for at the very least it denotes acceptance of the centralist hegemony of a Paris opera industry which sent its products into the French regions, complete with staging manuals and advice on how much investment in scenery or costumes would be required of regional managers. In this context, "local music" was not what was required, even though all constituencies involved in French opera had long prized ideas of "verisimilitude." As H. de Bury described it in *La France musicale*, *Mireille*, heroically cut by authors who had at first been too faithful to Mistral, was now "dynamic, interesting, not too long, and enlivened by richly colored popular scenes" (mouvementée, intéressante, peu longue et animée par des scènes populaires riches de couleur).<sup>24</sup> It was also easy to stage—easier even than the work the publisher Choudens released with it, the rather more immediately popular *Roland à Roncevaux*, by Auguste Mermet:

[*Mireille*] uses only the sets that everyone already has—peasant costumes easy to organize with what exists backstage in all regions. [. . .] Nothing complicated and nothing problematic whether in the interpretation or in the staging—simply requiring a group of artists capable of singing the *opéra-comique* repertory, whether by Auber, Adam, or Boieldieu.

(Cet opéra comique est encore plus facile à monter que *Roland*. Il ne faut que les décors que partout l'on a, des costumes de paysans faciles à arranger avec ce qu'il y a dans tous les magasins de province. [. . .] rien de compliqué, rien d'embarrassant ni dans l'interprétation, ni dans la mise en scène, mais seulement une réunion d'artistes tout simplement capable de chanter le répertoire courant de l'opéra comique, soit Auber, Adam et Boieldieu.)<sup>25</sup>

## Marseille: A Host but Not a Home

*Mireille* reached the Midi's most important opera house—Marseille—in December 1865. It would have been ideal for me to be able to effect synchronous comparisons for the later 1860s with neighboring towns—especially those in the central Provençal belt comprising Aix, Nîmes, and Avignon, and then further west to the Languedoc town of Montpellier. But without stimu-

23. *Le constitutionnel*, 21 March 1864, in Galland, *Dossier*, 29.

24. *La France musicale*, 29 (1 January 1865), 5.

25. *Ibid.* This was rather misleading publicity given the demands of the new act 1 waltz.

lus from the region's operatic capital there was no avid take-up of the opera in the South within the municipal theater system, and indeed what one finds is that *Mireille* performances often start—to the surprise of music critics covering them—only in the 1880s, by which time the opera is simply standard repertory capable of provoking little more than the odd pang of nostalgia. Yet even though “authenticity” looms large, the lack of interest in Marseille does not operate according to the expectations of Mistral-worship that Guieu portrays. The available reviews are limited, but the picture they present is far more counterintuitive.

For in 1865 the work appears to Marseillais critics as an opera specifically for and about the people of Arles and the Crau desert. Marseille is the opera's host but not its home, and the idea that large numbers of inland visitors will pack the opening performances is noted pithily in an unsigned review for the *Courrier de Marseille*:

Tonight the Grand-Théâtre is putting on the opera *Mireille*, a truly Arlésian work. We shall all admire M. Ponson's beautiful backdrop of the Arena. The whole of Arles will be in Marseille; it's their festival which is being offered to us. . . .

(Ce soir on représentera au Grand-Théâtre l'opéra de *Mireille*, un opéra tout arlésien. M. Ponson fera admirer sa belle décoration des Arènes. Arles sera tout entier à Marseille, c'est sa fête qui va nous être donnée. . . .)<sup>26</sup>

At most, Marseillais are—this time according to Cauvière in the *Gazette du Midi*—likely to be curious to see a representation of Provence on stage.<sup>27</sup> And while the pastoral evocations of the opera were generally appreciated—especially the hints of tambourin and gaboulet in the act 2 farandole, and Andrelox's musette<sup>28</sup>—one finds disconcerted writers from two papers, the *Gazette* and the *Nouvelliste*, complaining about localism so “real” that it appears inappropriate. In light of the views expressed by Provençaux in Paris, such discomfiture is surprising. It was also effective in that the critics' shared complaint secured the suppression of the only Provençal melody that had been identified as such by d'Ortigue: the processional march sung at the Saintes-Maries church to the Cantique de San-Gen (now in act 3). While unexceptionable in Paris, this scene proved inappropriate for Marseille because it

26. *Courrier de Marseille*, 29 December 1865, [2].

27. Cauvière, *Gazette du Midi*, 28 December 1865, [2]. At least one critic found it uncomfortable. Étienne Parrocel in *Le nouvelliste de Marseille* identified with the characters more closely than Cauvière (he mentioned “notre amour-propre provençal”), but found it difficult to see the inhabitants of Arles and the Crau as heroes and heroines and was embarrassed at the portrayal of the supposedly civilized Arlésien Ramon as a father prepared to strike his daughter (1 January 1866, [2–3], at [2]).

28. Mirevelt's admiring critique of the musette as reminding him of shepherds playing in the evening to bring their flocks home is unusually regionalist within the opera's Marseille reception, although he does not identify the oboe melody as an original folk melody; *La voie nouvelle*, 1 January 1866, 28.

simulated a venerable religious rite which also happened to be unique to the region. Ever sensitive to local needs but clearly unable to predict this one, the theater manager, Olivier Halanzier, cut it after the first performance.<sup>29</sup>

These responses to *Mireille* show mixed characteristics that fall well short of a decisive welcome or rejection on regionalist grounds. In the weekly *Écho de Marseille*, we find even Mistral treated with scorn by the regular theater critic “Daniel.”<sup>30</sup> While the opera’s incompleteness in its three-act guise was so problematic that certain critics recounted the original plot in order to make the point, Marseille critics were much more concerned with two things: the quality, in the abstract, of Gounod’s music as compared with *Faust* (which they knew well); and the quality of the singing itself. And it would be the latter, once it was reintroduced to the Marseille stage in 1879, that would define the opera’s function as a classic *débuts* opera allowing the principal light soprano of the *opéra-comique* company to do one of her three obligatory public auditions before having her contract confirmed for the season. In other words, the infamous act 1 waltz became a test-piece. More strikingly for those expecting regionalist sensibilities to emerge in the ensuing decades, as late as 1879 the poem was dismissed in the *Petit Marseillais* as “colorless” (intrigue incolore);<sup>31</sup> and even in 1896, when the Hell’s Valley and Rhône scenes were reintroduced, the overwhelming response in Marseille had not to do with local legend or identity but with the welcome rebalancing of the principal roles of Mireille, Vincent, and Ourrias—which meant the opera could now act as a *débuts* vehicle not only for the light soprano but also for the company’s light tenor and baritone.<sup>32</sup> Arguably, *Mireille* in Marseille lost all its regionalist potential as the decades passed, and as neighboring towns such as Aix, Nîmes, and Montpellier took it up in the 1880s as part of their municipal repertory, it gained precious little more.

Was it too early to expect an outpouring of local identification along the lines of Provençaux in Paris—or was the displacement of the Midi’s critics in the capital actually a necessary condition for such nostalgic identification in the manner of d’Ortigue? Was Marseille opinion not representative of Provence? Or did the municipal theater’s status as a major regional opera house render regionalist demands inappropriate, or a risk to its wider reputation? The explanation is certainly not one of isolationism among music critics in the face of a predominantly literary movement: most of those writing on the opera up to 1899 were historians and critics of art, local historians, poets, and librettists. Only a few, however, were paid-up *félibres*: the movement was indeed weak in Marseille. Moreover, Mistral, who supported the “doubly provincial” center-

29. See *Courrier de Marseille*, 2/3 January 1866, [2–3], where it is described as an (unintentional) “profanation” on Gounod’s part. Étienne Parrocel in *Le nouvelliste de Marseille* found it “parodic” (1 January 1866, [2–3]).

30. *Écho de Marseille*, 30 December 1865, 2.

31. Writer signed “G.,” *Petit Marseillais*, 5 April 1879, [2–3], at [2].

32. See, for instance, *Sémaphore de Marseille*, 13 October 1896.



ing of the *félibrige* movement around Avignon and Arles, viewed his nearest metropolis as a symbol of corruption and mercantilism, its potential as the *félibrige* capital also fatally undermined by the impurity of its non-Rhône Provençal dialect and its relative dearth of writers he admired.<sup>33</sup> The port city, dependent for its success on strangers passing through, was too distanced from the stability and community of rural life. Small wonder, then, that Marseillais were often as suspicious of Mistral as vice versa.<sup>34</sup> In addition, not all regionalists were supporters of the *félibrige* way of doing things, finding its rigid hierarchies, traditions, and Mistral-worship suffocating; and as is well known the *félibrige* movement was itself fractious and fractured along dialect lines in ways that belied the superficial unity conferred by the pyramidal organizational structure of groups and individuals.

Nevertheless, reviews of the opera at Marseille in 1879 and 1896 reveal signs of a shift in critical register—one that may well have helped the opera's sudden acceptance as part of the municipal theatre repertory in the Midi from the 1880s onwards. That shift was not towards regionalist identification with the opera, but it nevertheless showed greater sensitivity to regionalist concerns in general—even down to extensive discussion in 1879 as to the proper hair color for an ideal Mireille.<sup>35</sup> When the music critic J. Desaix claimed in the *Sémaphore de Marseille* that Gounod's music was “composed from nature” (*composée sur nature*), he was referencing a now ardent desire for rural authenticity among Provençal regionalists and making implicit comparisons with Impressionist developments in painting, where the outdoors was supplanting the studio as landscape painting—including of rural France—came into its own.<sup>36</sup> And Elzéard Rougier's 1896 jibe that Carré's libretto sounded as though written in a Parisian tenement “on the courtyard side” (*côté cour*)

33. Bonifassi, *Presse régionale de Provence*, 113–14. Bonifassi polarizes a landlocked “Roman” Provence and a coastal “Greek” one, locating much of Mistral's animus against Marseille as a rejection of the port city's Greek cosmopolitanism. But such neat divisions sit ill with the contemporary label “Homeric” to acclaim *Mirèio*. A more nuanced, though indirect, set of reasons for Mistral's preference of the rural interior comes via Louis Seguin's 1909 portrayal of a Provençal heartland synthesising Greek, Roman, and Catholic elements, with Latin as the crucible for its language (Seguin, *Génie provençal*, 4–7).

34. I can find no evidence, for instance, that Mistral traveled from his home in Maillane to attend any performance of *Mireille* at his region's main opera house (or indeed that he was invited); and his first known public lecture to a Marseille audience did not take place until 1883 despite there being a *Félibrige* “School of the Sea” from 1877—well ahead of Arles (1905). As late as 1913, the Avignon journal *L'art provençal*, which was *félibrige*-sympathetic, portrayed Marseille as more of a “corridor” to France than a part of France itself—and philistine to boot (Émile Sicard in *L'art Provençal*, 15 November 1913, 1–2).

35. Mme Vaillant-Couturier, as Mireille, was largely responsible for the 1879 production's success (see the private notes of Antoine Bouis in Arch. municipales Marseille 23 II 6, 213–16). However, as critics in the *Sémaphore* (5/6 October), the *Radical de Marseille* (6/7 October) and the *Gazette du Midi* (6/7 October) felt it necessary to discuss, she was blonde.

36. *Sémaphore de Marseille*, feuilletton 4 April 1879. Almost the entire article develops this idea and the extent to which it represented a rejection of false Parisian values.

was unleashed in the *Soleil du Midi* under the title “La vraie Mireille.”<sup>37</sup> Once more d’Ortigue’s 1864 call-sign—“le vrai”—lay at the heart of everything. And if one were more skeptical than Desaix (and most critics were), since the only “vraie” *Mireille* was *Mirèio*, the central question became that of what one had to do to make Gounod’s opera authentic enough, or faithful enough, to pass muster as a regionalist statement rather than as a repertory staple. Some things were to do with displacement: from the theater into the open air; from winter to summer; from a centralist artwork to a regionalist vehicle for *félibrige* celebration. But the driving necessity was that *Mireille* had to be restored to her transcendent death.<sup>38</sup> Thus it was that in the Arles Arena on 14 May 1899, Gounod’s *Mireille* expired in Vincent’s arms for almost the first time in thirty-five years, at the beginning of a glowing sunset and witnessed by around 20,000 spectators. Moreover, far from being a problem, the imbalance of roles in the opera now became an essential strength, for there is no cult of the “boy from Arles”—just the “girl.”

### Arles, 1899–1909: Authenticities of Nationalist Celebration

Nevertheless it was the beginning of a homecoming, not a triumphal end point. Neither was it Mistral’s idea but that of Arthur Fayot, the Arena’s manager, who was more accustomed to penning bulls than booking divas, and who approached the Arles town council for funding to put on his first ever opera as part of a regional agricultural show. By 1 April the decision had been taken, and local journalists immediately began to fret: would the same staging mistakes be made as in the past, with (as related by an unsigned writer for *Le forum républicain*) backdrops for act 2 that looked either like Rouen or the Saint-Trophime square [Arles cathedral square]; and what would the costumes be like?<sup>39</sup> There was no suggestion here that the 14 May performance was to be a *félibrige* event, even though the projected opening of the Museon Arlaten on 21 May alongside the septennial festival of the *jeux floraux* scheduled at the Théâtre Antique suggested a Mistral connection. Indeed, response in the Marseille *Provence artistique* as late as 13 April indicated something rather different: a decentralist project to match the recent Saint-Saëns *Déjanire* at the vast Béziers Arena, and one which appeared quite separate from specifically regionalist concerns. And this even though the author noted how the opera’s farandole was to be a “real” one and that the Parisian set-

37. *Soleil du Midi*, 7 November 1896, 1.

38. Despite being advertised as “complete” (sans coupures), which it was not, the October 1896 Marseille production had retained the happy ending. Rougier homed in on this omission at the outset of his *feuilleton* for the *Soleil du Midi* and the *Gazette du Midi* (20 October 1896, 3, in both papers)—a critique in which he claimed the poem, read aloud, was more musical than the opera.

39. *Forum républicain*, 1 April 1899, [1].

designer Diosse (whose firm also had an office in Lyon) was in the Arles region getting a sense of “local color.”<sup>40</sup>

Things changed radically once it became known that Mistral was involved in the production. His letters show him skeptical at first on being asked to preside over the performance—would Fayot have a strong enough stomach for such a risky enterprise?<sup>41</sup> But—and controversially—he warmed to the idea, prompting discussion within and outside *félibrige* circles over whether a work as inauthentic as Gounod's was appropriate for use within what was now becoming a Mistral celebration. In *Le petit Provençal*, L. Menvielle mentioned the “little disagreement” (*petite querelle*) that had arisen around the choice of an opera that travestied the original poem—but declined to elaborate, and dubbed the opera simply “the pretext for an entire race to reaffirm its veneration for the good and great Provençal” (*le prétexte à toute une race d'affirmer sa vénération pour le bon et grand Provençal*).<sup>42</sup> Elzéard Rougier was more supportively pragmatic in *Le petit Marseillais*: for all the problems of mutilation there was only one operatic *Mireille*, and so no real choice. In particular, the irreversible lack of a *Mireille* from Bizet, who would have stood his ground more than Gounod, was, he said, unfortunate.<sup>43</sup> The terms of the argument were revealed most explicitly by a spat between the *Soleil du Midi* (Marseille) and the Arles weekly *L'homme de bronze*. Denys Bourdet of the *Soleil du Midi*—which was protectively supportive of Mistral's organic, rural conception of the *félibrige*, opined that Gounod would never have allowed something so crass as the presentation of his refined (i.e., decadent) Parisian chamber opera in a venue designed for bullfights, and that Mistral had become vain, selling out the *félibrige* commitment to local tradition and putting on an absurd imitation of the outdoor Classical plays at the Roman theater in Orange or (worse) the colossal spectacles at the Béziers Arena. Here, rather than in references to musical style, was the entry-point for Wagner into the Midi's reception of *Mireille*: that Mistral was trying to create his own

40. *Provence artistique*, 13 April 1899, 2, signed “Un cigalier.” It begins and ends with enthusiastic encouragement to decentralization.

41. Letter to Dr. Marignan, director of the nascent Museon Arlaten, 19 February 1899. Mistral calls Fayot an “oseur” (a daredevil) and is reluctant to accept his invitation to preside at the proposed event. Copy in Palais du Roure, Avignon, Correspondance de Frédéric Mistral, 1896–99.

42. *Petit Provençal*, 15 May 1899, 1.

43. *Petit Marseillais*, 15 May 1899, 2. Reviewing the 1899 *Mireille*, he noted that using Daudet's play *L'Arlésienne* had been mooted within *félibrige* circles, and that Bizet's music would undoubtedly have been a great success; but the fact that the original was French-language would have been off-putting (Rougier, *Pages de route*, 2). However, adopting the play as a piece for festival celebration could not, surely, have been an ideal option for Mistral. Daudet's “Arlésienne” was an explicitly nonvirginal character; she lacked iconic potential because she never appeared onstage; worst of all the play intrusively dramatized the suicide of Mistral's own nephew. There is no hint that Massenet's *Sapho* might have been another possibility. It was too early: it reached Montpellier in December 1899, but Toulouse and Marseille only in 1901.

Bayreuth.<sup>44</sup> If Bourdet sounded cynical, however, his main opponent, “P. D.” (Pierre Detouche) of *L’homme de bronze*, was even more so. There was no point, wrote this writer who claimed to be independent of all cliques, in the *Soleil du Midi* remaining “more royalist than the King” (plus royaliste que le Roy)—a double reference to the paper’s political and regionalist sympathies.<sup>45</sup> Despite the fact that the opera was mediocre, and a “laughable copy of a masterpiece” (la ridicule copie d’un chef-d’œuvre), the *félibres* needed Gounod now more than ever as a bulwark against the increasingly homogenizing influence of Parisian values, because his opera embodied enough of those values to form a bridge between the two. Mistral himself, opined “P. D.,” would never have tolerated a Roman-arena *Mireille* thirty-five years before; but the situation was now more serious because the regionalist gains of the 1860s had been lost. Moreover, audience response to *Mireille* was not intended to be comfortable or positive, as Bourdet assumed was optimal. Quite the opposite: a recognition of the parodic falsity of the Parisian copy would, hoped “P. D.,” cause a Provençal audience to interrogate the contrast between Mistral’s genius and “the pale fiction set to music, which Paris swooned over” (la pâle affabulation musiquée dont Paris se pâma . . .), and to prompt a return to their Provençal cultural roots.<sup>46</sup> Neither extreme accorded with Mistral’s view; and therein lies the importance of the eventual 1899 template, for as we shall see, Mistral’s instinct was not to allow the work to fail or to alienate, but to act positively to effect its integration.

Mistral himself remained silent in his memoirs and speeches about the Arles festival performances of 1899 or 1909, or Saint-Rémy-de-Provence in 1913, and he died shortly before the *Mireille* of the *feste vierginenco* at Arles in 1914. But both his correspondence and reports in the local press reveal considerable organizational involvement, and his regular attendance at such events indicates continuing support. From the first he was delighted with the manner in which festival *Mireille* performances were contributing to a general increase in momentum for the *félibrige* movement.<sup>47</sup> And precisely as “P. D.” reported in *L’homme de bronze* of 7 May 1899, he had contributed personally to that success: a puff article in the *Forum républicain* of Arles describes a mid-April meeting with Diosse, theater manager Jean Anfossi (*dît* Valcourt), and Fayot himself, at which Fayot “asked the master not to offer advice alone, but,

44. *Soleil du Midi*, 28 April 1899, 1. One of the article’s subtitles is “Mireille thrown to the animals” (*Mireille livrée aux bêtes*). Bourdet excused those dissident *félibres* who had protested against the opera, and concluded that the movement had lost its original authenticity.

45. *L’homme de bronze*, 30 April 1899, [2]. “P. D.” identified himself in a signed review of the *Mireille* performance in the *Sémaphore de Marseille*, 16 May 1899, [1].

46. *L’homme de bronze*, 7 May 1899, 1–2, at 2.

47. Letter of 18 May 1899 to Jules Vêran, thanking him for a positive review of the festival in *L’éclair de Montpellier* (review 16 May 1899, 3), and letter of 24 May 1899 to Antoine Chansroux in which he listed the Arena *Mireille* among recent successes for the movement. Copies in Palais du Roure, Avignon, Correspondance de Frédéric Mistral, 1896–99.

rather, to dictate what was necessary to offer *Mireille* to the public in the manner his brilliant imagination had conceived it" (a prié le maître non pas de donner des conseils seulement mais encore de dicter ce qu'il fallait faire pour donner au public *Mireille* telle que sa brillante imagination l'avait conçue).<sup>48</sup> The idea of restoring Mireille's death scene, then, most likely came from Mistral himself; it is certainly well known that he deplored the happy ending commonly in use. And the retention of the Arles Arena backdrop for act 2 most likely had his support. The Provençal-language press directed by those closest to Mistral—*L'Aïoli*—reported enthusiastically though briefly after the event (it was dedicated to literature rather than to music), and it comes as no surprise to find Paul Mariéton writing similarly in his *Revue félibréenne*, since Mistral had deputed his young acolyte to help him organize the 1899 performance, indicating in no uncertain terms that *Mireille's* success in Arles should even take priority over Mariéton's own series of Classical plays, with *félibrige* pilgrimages attached, at Orange.<sup>49</sup> Pragmatism had won out: there were, after all, few other ways of celebrating the poem in such monumental style. One could not organize a reading of the epic on such a scale; and Mistral had always refused to let it be turned into a play. In addition, his mode of attendance in 1899 and later decisively turned attention away from the musical aspect of the event: he would routinely arrive last, in convoy with the local mayor and other dignitaries, and amid cheering crowds. There was no doubt as to who, and what, was being celebrated through music. And it was not Gounod. Mistral decisively appropriated Arthur Fayot's money-spinning venture to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of his poem.

Putting on such a performance in a town with no resident operatic tradition meant importing singers. In 1899 and 1909 the singers came from the Opéra-Comique, bringing with them the kind of all-purpose peasant costumes that so offended Provençal eyes in 1864 and over which Mistral appears to have had no control because they came from outside. The same thing happened in 1909 and 1914, the tendency being that the principals wore generic costumes while the chorus, which included local singers, did not. In *fin-de-siècle* Arles the former was a major blunder. For in Arles, of all places, costume was not just a matter of theatrical accessory. It was, for the women (and even more so, for men's image of their women), a symbol of rootedness, decorum, and fidelity to local tradition. From 1899 it became traditional at festival time to include a "Bal Mireille," at which local dress was obligatory. Moreover, at celebratory events Mistral routinely surrounded himself, his wife, and the elected Queen of the Félibres with a hand-picked bevy of up to thirty young women from Maillane or Arles, properly attired and who duly scattered flowers where needed. Finally, and most importantly, the precise folding and

48. Unsigned, *Forum républicain*, 15 April 1899, [1–2], at [2].

49. Mistral needed Mariéton to keep Fayot in order. See Vial [*pseud.* Critobule], *Paul Mariéton d'après sa correspondance*, 2:240–41.

pinning of the shawl, the tilt of the headdress, and all other aspects of women's Provençal costume, which traditionally varied according to age and status, were celebrated as ethnographic facts at the Museon Arlaten that Mistral himself founded in 1899. It was with the museum's potential as a model in mind that he instituted the *feste vièrginenco* in 1903, and when, on 25 October 2009, the Museon Arlaten shut for four years of renovation work, the last public act was the ceremonial disrobing of an Arlésienne mannequin.<sup>50</sup>

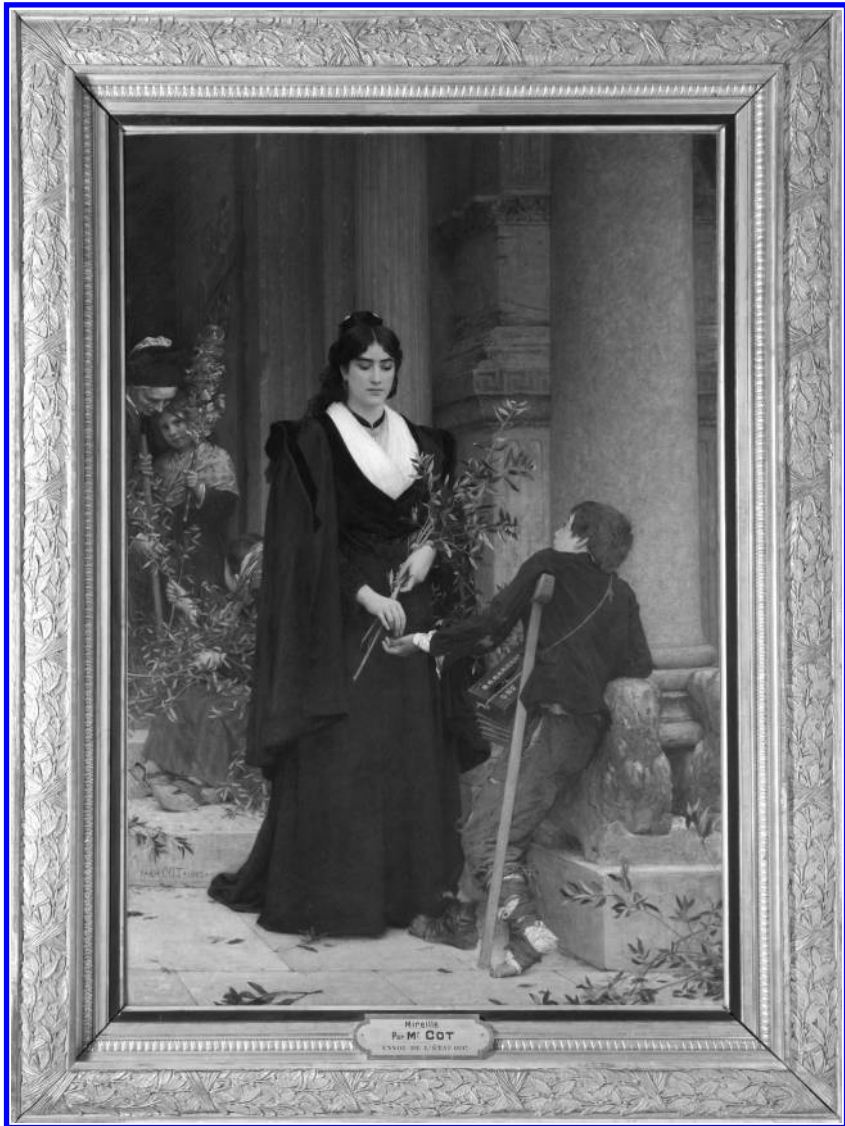
Through exhibits of everyday tools, textiles, home décor, and musical instruments, rural Provence was presented here with a record of its own disappearing way of life, the aura of a golden bygone age potent even at the time of its official opening in 1899. When, in advance of the festival, Denys Bourdet visited the Museon for the *Soleil du Midi*'s readers, his response could hardly have been more different from his reaction to the prospect of Gounod's opera being presented at the Arena. For him it was a pilgrimage to see "the entire history of a land [. . .] concretized in costumes, everyday objects, and guild banners" (*toute l'histoire d'un pays [. . .] concrétisée en des costumes, en des objets familiers, et en des bannières de confréries*).<sup>51</sup> As he walked around the three rooms of the museum, his first and longest discussion was of the second, in which a diorama of a wealthy mother receiving congratulatory visits on her newborn child catalyzed a lyrical outpouring from Bourdet on the unassailable beauty and finesse of Provençal women, the delicacy of their silks and lace, and the many "objects of an artistry and elegance now gone" (*objets d'un art et d'une élégance disparus*) whose link to ancient legends about the glories of Provençal women would push a visitor's contemplation beyond aesthetics and towards something akin to cultural pride and longing combined.<sup>52</sup> The vision presented was, of course, both deeply patriarchal and specifically high-bourgeois Catholic, contrasting both with the more modest first diorama of a farmhouse kitchen on Christmas Eve, and with the assorted mix of farming tools and folk instruments presented in the final room.<sup>53</sup> It was, however, entirely consonant with one of the most famous, though unusually elevated, images of Mireille, painted in 1882 by the Languedoc artist Pierre-Auguste Cot—that of a poised young lady in her Sunday best, giving alms to a crippled child on her exit from Saint-Trophime on Palm Sunday (see Fig. 4).

50. There is room for confusion about the relationship between "Mireille" costume and "Arlésienne" costume, since the latter is used generically but also denotes a specific variant (colored, silk) to which young women, who have reached beyond the "Mireille" stage (cotton, black and white), graduate.

51. *Soleil du Midi*, 5 May 1899, 1.

52. *Ibid.*

53. Mistral's letters reveal that he spent much of the latter part of 1898 gathering and meticulously curating the musical instrument display of his new museum. Palais du Roure, Avignon, Correspondance de Frédéric Mistral, 1896–99.



**Figure 4** Pierre-Auguste Cot, *Mireille faisant l'aumône à la sortie de l'église Saint-Trophime, en Arles, le dimanche des rameaux* (1882). Photo Frédéric Jaulmes. Musée F.-X. Fabre, Montpellier: © Musée Fabre, Montpellier Agglomération; used with permission.

If operatic inauthenticity had already worked its transformative magic on *Mireille the Arlésienne* by the early 1880s, Mistral's new museum translated the phenomenon into wax models, the association with *Mireille* herself strengthened as the opera simultaneously brought it to life on the Arena's stage and replicated it in the audience by the thousand. When Bourdet emerged from his preview of the museum and found himself face to face with modern French life—a poster for the latest popular novel by Georges Ohnet—he reported himself seized by a “violent nostalgia” (*nostalgie violente*). It made him want to turn back, and back in time, to the museum's historical reconstruction and to what he called its “high-level ethnographic teaching” (*haut enseignement ethnographique*).<sup>54</sup> Herein, for Bourdet, lay not anachronism, but accuracy: d'Ortigue's “le vrai.” For Mistral, however, the sudden reanimation of this invented tradition must initially have appeared somewhat ironic. By agreeing to preside over Fayot's performance he was contributing to a step-change in the power of an ethnographic myth about his *Mirèio* as the quintessential *Arlésienne*—that myth itself dependent on a deliberate operatic misreading of his poem for the purposes of scenic effect. Normally such inauthenticity would have been laughed out of court, but to my knowledge, beyond the early reference to the “frightful” (*effrayant*) Saint-Trophime backdrops of old in *Le forum républicain*, no one commented on it at the time.<sup>55</sup> Equally, no one mused on the double inauthenticity of the 1899 decision to complement the libretto's specified act 2 décor of the Arles Arena with a curtain representing—so faithfully that it elicited cries of surprise and pleasure from among the audience—that very same cathedral square (see Fig. 5).<sup>56</sup> There would have been too much to lose: what had become the first *Mireille* festival demanded a tone of pure Mistralian celebration. Indeed, if the 15 April puff article of the *Forum républicain* is to be taken at face value, it is possible that Mistral not only supported the selection of the Arles cathedral square as the act 2 backdrop, but recommended it. In any case, to return to Leerssen's model for a moment, too slavish a notion of authenticity would have deprived the festival of obvious “symbolically invested sites.”

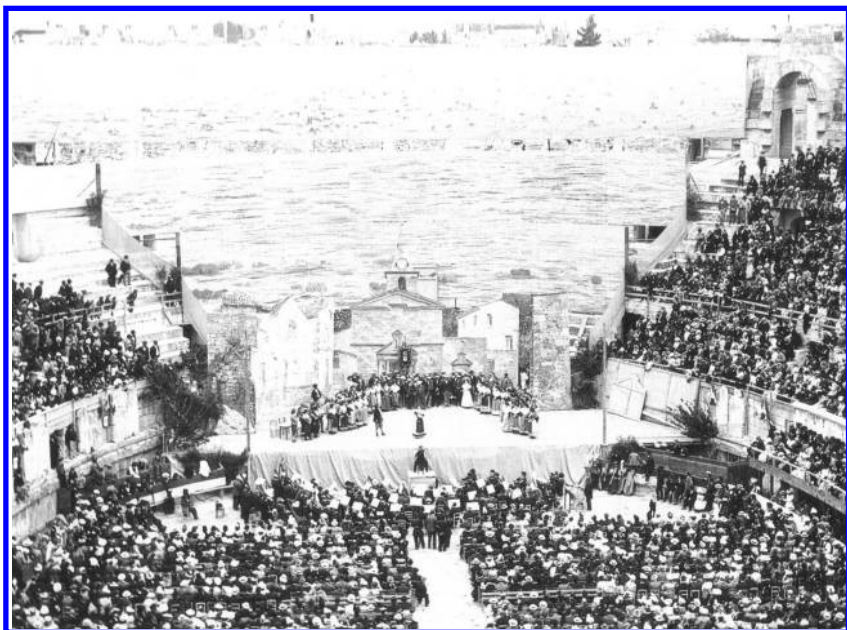
Gounod was a different matter. Discussions of authenticity dominated the musical content of reviews of 1899, 1909, 1913, and 1914 alike. More importantly, the preoccupations behind them set in motion new performance traditions that rendered festival stagings of *Mireille* in the Midi different from those anywhere else—including those on the municipal theater circuit—and against which the composer, who had died in 1893, was unable to protest. The first two preoccupations (1899) were musical, a third (1913) was environmental, and a fourth (1914) was linguistic. One—at least—was inspired by

54. *Soleil du Midi*, 5 May 1899, 2.

55. *Forum républicain*, 1 April 1899, [1].

56. As reported by the sympathetic Jules Vèran [Vèrand], *L'éclair de Montpellier*, 16 May 1899, 3.





**Figure 5** *Mireille*, act 2, Arles arena, 14 May 1899. Photographer unknown. Archives Iconographiques du Palais du Roure, Avignon, Fonds Flandreysy-Espérandieu.

Mistral himself. All were intended to bring the experience of hearing the opera closer to home, and to render local, or in Leerssen's terms, "national," what Gounod, in the eyes of his critics, had made "universal." The most obvious changes came in the form of folk culture. Act 2 of Gounod's opera begins with a choral evocation of the farandole—the Provençal national dance. It was the only scene within the March 1864 Paris premiere with which we know that Mistral was dissatisfied, and in 1899 no one would have been in any doubt that along with good weather he viewed a group of real Provençal farandoleurs as essential to the work's success in the Arles Arena.<sup>57</sup> All the performances between 1899 and 1914 involved real farandoles and real farandoleurs, advertised from the outset, in 1899, as an unmissable attraction. Yet for all their money-making potential their presence was not an exercise in autoexoticism for the benefit of tourists; it was a statement of ethnic identity. Rougier predicted that "the authentic farandole will be the star turn of the performance" (*la farandole authentique sera le clou de la représentation*), and he was absolutely right.<sup>58</sup>

57. Letter of 24 April to Dr. Marignan. Copy in Palais du Roure, Avignon, Correspondance de Frédéric Mistral, 1896–99.

58. *Petit Marseillais*, 15 May 1899, 2.

Historiographically, perhaps the most valuable reviews of 1899 come from within and close to the *félibrige* movement: from the ever-faithful Jules Véraan (Vérand) in *L'Éclair de Montpellier*, whom Mistral thanked warmly by letter;<sup>59</sup> from Mariéton in the *Revue félibréenne*; and within the *Pages de route* series of essays by the Marseille writer Elzéard Rougier, who had stoutly defended the idea of an Arena performance of *Mirville* from the outset, despite admitting that it was Parisian, “sugary and rouged” (*sucrée et fardée*).<sup>60</sup> Their significance is double-edged in that they applauded the new authenticity which rendered the music ethnically valid, while embracing an inauthentic backdrop which nevertheless also served to intensify the national character of the overall experience. Véraan explained how this key moment of the performance took place in front of the act 2 curtain representing the Arles cathedral square (see Fig. 6):

Gounod's farandole, one of the least successful parts of the work because it is one of the most Parisian, was replaced by a popular *air* to which farandoleurs in all the villages of Provence dance. [. . .] It was the triumph of beauty, of grace, of harmony.

(L'air de la farandole de Gounod, une des parties les moins réussies de son œuvre parce qu'elle est une des plus parisiennes, est remplacé par l'air populaire sur lequel se rythment les farandoles dans tous les villages de Provence. [. . .] Ce fut le triomphe de la beauté, de la grâce, de l'harmonie.)<sup>61</sup>

Likewise without apparent irony, Mariéton situated the very same “Cathedral Act” (*acte de la Major*) as that in which Provençal enthusiasm was given free rein:

A native farandole, replacing Gounod's *arrangement*, was danced by authentic dancers—male and female—of the Barbantane school, accompanied center stage by the Maillane town band, and framed by two tambourin players who remained at either side of the stage. Tumultuous acclamation greeted the evocation of this pleasing harmony which it [the farandole] set forth in the most perfect unity of ethnicity and beauty.

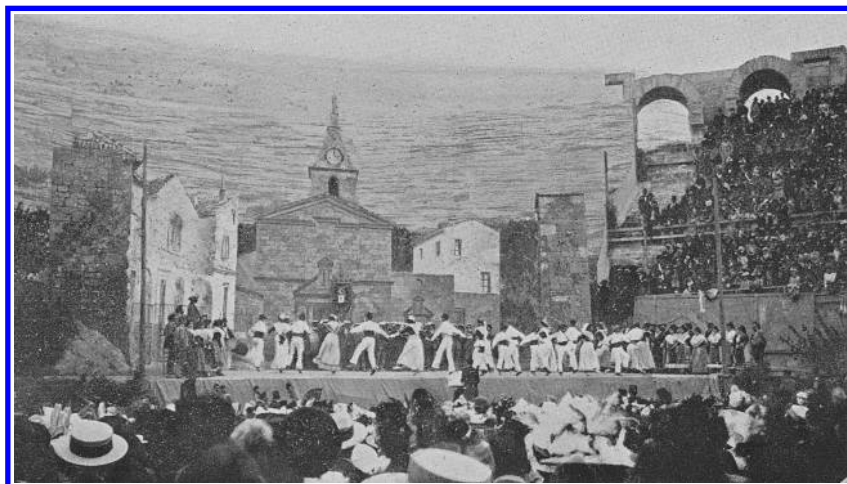
(Une farandole indigène, substituée à l'*arrangement* de Gounod, était dansée par d'authentiques farandoleurs et farandoleuses—le conservatoire de Barbantane—accompagnée, au centre, par la musique de Maillane, et encadrée par deux tambourinaires immobiles à chaque extrémité de la scène. Des houles d'acclamations s'élevèrent, à l'évocation d'eurythmie qu'elle déroulait dans le plus parfait accord de race et de la beauté.)<sup>62</sup>

59. Letter of 18 May 1899. Copy in Palais du Roure, Avignon, Correspondance de Frédéric Mistral, 1896–99.

60. Rougier, *Pages de route*, 2.

61. *L'éclair de Montpellier*, 16 May 1899, 3.

62. *Revue félibréenne* 14 (1898–99); 334–39, at 336; reprinted from *Le théâtre*, 15 June 1899. From the late nineteenth century, the town of Barbantane was a recognized center for research on the farandole. See Laurent Sébastien Fournier, “Le musée avorté de la Farandole à Barbantane,” <http://bne.lagramillere.free.fr/barbantanesecavortedelafarandole.htm>, reproduced from *Du haut de la tour*, no. 72 (January 2010), accessed 30 October 2011.



**Figure 6** Detail of *Mireille*, act 2: farandole, Arles arena, 14 May 1899. Photographer unknown. From *La vie provençale*, July 1899, p. 199. Used with permission of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Rougier's ploy was exceptional in that he made the Cathedral Act the subject of a striking rhetorical jest in which he described the Arles square twice, in identical passages, at three pages' distance. The first instance conveyed the realism of the backdrop to the farandole, with its bleached houses devoured by strong light, its mysterious side streets and its pointed church bell tower with cameo clock; the second saw him losing himself among the backstreets of Arles in the dusk, still enraptured by the performance, until a new view brought him up sharp:

Suddenly I looked around me and found myself in a neighborhood which I thought I knew, which I recognized by its bleached houses devoured by the light, by its rather mysterious side streets, by its venerable church, whose pointed bell tower had a clock in the form of a cameo. I found myself in that very Cathedral Square which I had so admired, just recently, at the performance of *Mireille*.

(Tout à coup je regardai autour de moi et me trouvai dans un quartier que je croyais reconnaître, que je reconnaissais à ses maisons décolorées, mangées par la lumière, à ses fonds de rue un peu mystérieux, à sa vénérable église, dont le clocher pointu portait son horloge en camée. Je me trouvais sur cette place de la Major que j'avais tant admirée, tantôt, à la représentation de *Mireille*.)<sup>63</sup>

Could there be a more striking way of fusing Arles, Gounod's *Mireille*, and d'Ortigue's "vrai" than this imaginary recognition scene, in which the real is identified by reference to its simulacrum? I have not found one. And yet there

63. Rougier, *Pages de route*, 6.

was another step towards authenticity that had apparently still to be taken in 1899. Writing in *La vie provençale*, the music critic Gustave Dérépas argued that if the properly dressed Arlésiennes harvesting from the mulberry trees in act I gave a semblance of the “true,” and the farandole provided “true reality” (la réalité vraie), nevertheless the town band was out of place: the dancers should have been accompanied by gaboulet and tambourin alone.<sup>64</sup> It was an indication that alongside selective appropriation of the inauthentic, the quest for “true reality” would continue.

But even without such ethnographic purity these performers brought a crucial disjunction of the real and the imaginary to a score which Dérépas, too, thought excessively Parisian and, as he expressed in an aside, alas not written by Bizet.<sup>65</sup> It was a disjunction made immediately more apparent in the next scene: the “Chanson de Magali.” Effectively a love song, its poetic form embodies the “chase” of the boy who boasts that he will transform himself into all kinds of creatures, objects, and elements in order to get the girl, and the girl who responds with evasive transformations of her own until she finally runs out of ideas. Gounod’s duet, alternating 6/8 and 9/8 meters, was simple but through-composed. And while he merely hinted at Mistral’s melody—transcribed by François Seguin and reprinted in 1859 at the close of *Mirèio*’s first edition—his version was, especially in its metrical play, strikingly close to the alternating two- and three-measure phrase structure of both Mistral’s chosen tune and the “Bouenjour, lou roussignòu sauvage” melody from which the poet’s idea for a “Magali” chanson originally sprang (see Figs. 7a–c).<sup>66</sup> It was, interestingly, precisely the metrical aspect of the Gounod duet that d’Ortigue found disconcerting at first, describing it in 1864 as “odd” (étrange).<sup>67</sup>

64. *La vie provençale*, July 1899, 197–99, at 198.

65. *Ibid.*, 197.

66. Notwithstanding the methodological problems of transcribing oral traditions, the way Canteloube barred many of his transcribed melodies from Provence makes explicit the fact that such alternation is characteristic at the level of the measure (e.g., “L’autre jour, mè passajavi,” or “Dins Paris, l’a uno vièyo”); but it is also common at the level of the phrase (in addition to the two “Mistral” melodies, see “Mon payre avié”); Canteloube, *Anthologie*, 1:18, 19, and 39. Discussing the filiation of these three melodies, the social historian Michel Faure claims that Seguin actually composed Mistral’s version, and at Gounod’s request. The latter cannot be accurate, given that the first documented hint of Gounod’s interest in *Mirèio* dates only from January 1862 (Huebner, *Operas of Charles Gounod*, 68) and the melody was already published in 1859; Faure, “La chanson du roi de Thulé et la chanson de Magali (Gounod, *Faust*: 1859; *Mirèio*: 1864),” <http://musique.histoire.free.fr/michel-faure-musique.php?musicologue=articles&article=chanson-populaire&type=roi=de=la=thule>, 2, accessed 30 October 2011. Moreover, in contradistinction to the Laurens “Magali” setting, which Mistral described as “composed,” that of Seguin was “transcribed.” Mistral, *Mirèio*, 509, 513.

67. D’Ortigue, *Journal des débats*, 30 March 1864, in Galland, *Dossier*, 151.

MIR. *p*  
La brise est douce et parfume - mée      L'oiseau s'endort sous la ra -  
- mée      Au fond du bois silencieux      Au fond du bois silencieux

The image shows a page of a musical score for the song "Chanson de Magali" from the opera "Mireille" by Charles Gounod. The score is written for voice and piano. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower staff. The music is in 6/8 time and G major. The lyrics are in Occitan. The score is divided into two systems. The first system contains the first two lines of music and lyrics. The second system contains the next two lines. The piano part features a simple harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines in both hands. The vocal line is melodic and expressive, with some fermatas. The page is numbered 489 in the top right corner.

Figure 7a "Chanson de Magali," *Mireille*, act 2, mm. 4-19. Gounod, *Mireille: Opéra en 5 actes, tiré du Poème de Frédéric Mistral par Michel Carré* [...]. *Partition chant et piano* (Paris: Choudens, n.d., plate no. 1010), 57-58. Author's collection.

58

M. *cresc.*

-eux — La nuit sur nous étend son voi\_ le Et dans les cieux Je

*cresc. molto.*

M. *p*

vois une a\_ moureuse étoi\_ le Luire à mes yeux!\_

*f* *dim.* *pp* *p*

Figure 7a continued

**MAGALI**

MÉLODIE PROVENÇALE POPULAIRE

TRANSCRITE

PAR FR. SEGUIN.

CHANT

O Ma-ga-li, ma tan a-

PIANO

*Allegretto*

ma-do, Me-te la tès-to au fenestrou

**Figure 7b** “Magali, mélodie provençale populaire,” transcrit par Fr[ançois] Seguin, as published at the close of Frédéric Mistral, *Mirèio: Pouèmo prouvençau (avec la traduction littérale en regard)* (Avignon: J. Roumanille, 1859), 509–11. Taylorian Library, Oxford.

In the folksong, Magali’s beloved invites her to look out of the window so that he can serenade her to better effect. The annotation in an unknown hand corrects the text and underlay to place the word “fenestrou” (window) under the last beat of m. 4, cadencing in m. 5.

— 510 —

The image shows a page of a musical score with three systems of music. Each system consists of a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff with treble and bass clefs). The music is in a key with two sharps (F# and C#) and a 3/4 time signature. The lyrics are in French and are written below the vocal line.

troun : Es- coute un pau a- questo au-

ba- do De tam- bou- rin e de viou-

loun. Ei plen d'es- tel- lo a- pe- ra-

Figure 7b continued



— 511 —

mount! L'au-ro es toum- ba- do; Mai lis es-

tel- lo pa- li- ran, Quand te vei- ran!

The image shows a page of musical notation for a vocal and piano piece. At the top center, the page number is indicated as "— 511 —". The score is divided into two systems. The first system consists of three staves: a vocal line in the treble clef, a piano right-hand part in the treble clef, and a piano left-hand part in the bass clef. The lyrics "mount! L'au-ro es toum- ba- do; Mai lis es-" are written below the vocal staff. The second system also consists of three staves: a vocal line in the treble clef, a piano right-hand part in the treble clef, and a piano left-hand part in the bass clef. The lyrics "tel- lo pa- li- ran, Quand te vei- ran!" are written below the vocal staff. The music is in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line and a more active right-hand part with chords and moving lines.

Figure 7b continued

PROVENCE 37

**PROVENCE**

**BOUENJOUR, LOU ROUSSIGNOU (1)**

Bonjour, le rossignol

Bien allant

Bou - en jour, lou rous - si - gnòu sau - va - ge, Ount' es qu'a -  
 Bon - jour, le ros - si - gnol sau - va - ge, Oü donc as -  
 Cre - siéu qu'a - vià restà'n vou - ia - ge, Din lou coum -  
 T'craignais que tu aies per - du la vi - e, Dans le com -  
 - via tan de mou - ra ? N'en fu - gues lou ben ar - ri -  
 - tu tant de meu - ré ? Lors, que tu fus bien ar - ri -  
 - bat de Gi - bral - tà !  
 - bat de Gi - bral - tar !  
 - bat De toun vou - ia - ge, Que dou mou -  
 - vé De ton vo - ya - ge, Le mo - men -  
 - men que t'ay au - zi M'as re - jou - i .  
 ou je l'en - ten - dis M'a ré - jou - i .

2. « — Moussu, qu'ave de coumplasenço  
 De vous n'en souveni de iéu!  
 May ièu aurey la prevenenço  
 De veni eyci passa l'estiéu;  
 O, proumete qu'en voste hounour,  
 Din moun ramage,  
 N'en chantarey la niue, lou jour,  
 Eyci, l'entour. »

2. « — Que vous avez de complaisance,  
 Monsieur, d'vous souvenir de moi!  
 Mais moi j'aurai la prévenance  
 De v'nir ici passer l'été;  
 Je vous promets qu'en votre honneur,  
 Dans mon ramage,  
 Je chanterai la nuit, le jour,  
 Ici, partout. »

3. « — Ièu te doune la préferenço,  
 Si vos chanta din moun jardin;  
 Au jardinié farcy defenso  
 De te causer ges de chagrin;  
 Si per asar, li vos niça,  
 Li a de fullhage,  
 Li manquera pas de fricò  
 Per toui pichò. »

3. « — Moi je te donn' la préférence.  
 Si tu veux chanter au jardin;  
 Au jardinier je t'rai défense  
 De te causer quelque chagrin;  
 Si, par hasard, tu veux nicher,  
 Y a du feuillage;  
 Le fricot sera abondant  
 Pour tes enfants. »

(1) Cet air donna à Mistral l'idée d'écrire la chanson de Magali. Il entendit, en 1845, un laboureur chanter cette chanson, dit-il lui-même. Elle semble contemporaine du 1<sup>er</sup> Empire. Elle était jadis populaire en Provence, en Vivarais et sur toute la côte méditerranéenne. Le chanteur, dit Mistral (lettre du 7 décembre 1898, adressée au Félibrige), avait environ 40 à 45 ans, était de Villeneuve-lès-Avignon et avait longtemps habité Beaucaire. On retrouve aujourd'hui cet air en Auvergne, en Rouergue (Cf. Guyenne).

Figure 7c “Bouenjour, lou roussignòu,” transcribed by Joseph Canteloube, *Anthologie des chants populaires français groupés et présentés par pays ou provinces*, 4 vols (Paris: Durand, 1951), 1:37. © Éditions Durand. Used with kind authorization of Universal Music Publishing Classical.

Into this scene of rustic allusion strode Jane Marignan, the soprano who in 1899 played Mireille, first in Arles and then in her home town of Nîmes. In a move that caused delighted uproar in both venues, once her duet with Julien Leprestre's Vincent was over she broke role, advanced to the front of the stage and sang the poem to Mistral's chosen tune, unaccompanied, in her native Provençal. As Mariéton put it, Marignan was "divesting herself of her Frenchified finery, becoming *Mirèio* again" (*dépouillant ses atours franchimands, redevenant Mirèio*).<sup>68</sup> The Arles audience started cheering almost immediately, gathered itself into attentiveness, and then lasted just one strophe before rising to its feet in frenetic tribute to Mistral.<sup>69</sup> It was the ultimate compliment to the poet, and the ultimate indication that Gounod's brand of local color was inadequate. In this small tableau of the opera, then—ironically the place where Gounod seems to have tried hardest to sustain a folk-inspired Provençal mood throughout a scene-complex—his music had been upstaged in no uncertain terms by the "local," the "natural" and the "true." No link is ever made in the press with act 2 of Massenet's *Sapho* (1897), where Sapho/Fanny seduces the homesick Jean by singing him the "real" Magali chanson, unaccompanied and in Mistral's Provençal. Marignan, however, almost certainly had it in mind. Indeed, *Sapho* might actually have given her the idea of singing Mistral his signature chanson: she had performed Massenet's title role at the Grand-Théâtre in Alger just a couple of months earlier, partnered there, too, by Leprestre.<sup>70</sup>

By 1909 all opposition to the idea of staging *Mireille* for the poem's fiftieth anniversary in similar fashion would have been untimely and unwelcome, and indeed the celebrations were broadly similar to those of 1899 bar the unfortunate fact that a real mistral blew, ruining four of the five intended drop-curtains for the opera and leaving the entire opera performance to play out in the mulberry orchard of act 1. Such restriction was a fallback position in two senses, for Mistral had been hoping to harness new publicity technologies to create a more effective celebration than that of 1899. In 1908 he had welcomed Henri Cain and a team from the Film d'Art company to shoot a cinematic *Mireille* for which he provided the scenario and supplied the vast majority of the extras, in and around Arles. Overjoyed at the idea of international impact, he was to be disappointed in that the release of the first filmed *Mireille* was delayed because of commercial rivalries between film companies, and frictions within them.<sup>71</sup> Amid such uncertainty as to how the fiftieth anniversary was to be celebrated artistically, another Arena performance was an essential minimum, and Mistral charged his loyal supporter, J. Charles-Roux,

68. *Revue félibréenne* 14 (1898–99): 336–37.

69. Jules Vèran (Vèrand) in *L'éclair de Montpellier*, 16 May 1899, 3.

70. *Ménestrel*, 65 (2 April 1899): 112. Leprestre had premiered the rôle of Jean, alongside the Provençale Emma Calvé as Sapho/Fanny.

71. Toulet, "Des Arlésiennes de cinéma," 266.

with overseeing it.<sup>72</sup> Many of the attendant phenomena echoed those of 1899, helping cement many aspects of its invented tradition: the Museon Arlaten's extension was opened courtesy of monies from Mistral's Nobel Prize for Literature of 1904; a statue of Mistral was unveiled in Arles itself; there was another "Bal Mireille"; Mistral attended, visible to all on an elevated stage; the folk interpolation of the real farandole was retained and celebrated (though there was no repeat, from Aline Vallandri, of Marignan's folksinging); and the opera remained the central, unmissable, event of the festival. In terms of press reception, Gounod's star rose significantly. Amid the celebratory atmosphere disparaging references disappeared, and although the opera remained a vehicle for Mistral-worship, the composer was referred to—and not just by obviously interested parties—as a worthy partner to Provence's national poet.

### Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, 1913: Authenticities of Place

It was not until 1913 that another step-change occurred. A further layer of the natural and the local was brought to bear on *Mireille* in the shape of what one might call an "authentic background" technique. The 1913 celebration in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence was, uniquely among the performances discussed here, primarily a celebration of Gounod rather than of Mistral. It was scheduled, after intense lobbying from *félibres* led by Charles Formentin in Avignon, to commemorate his composition of much of the score while in Provence in 1863, culminating in a performance of *Mireille* in the open air, in the Vallon de Saint-Clerc—the very spot, a couple of hours' walk from the town, where Gounod had revelled in the inspirational scenery and had sketched out much of the music. The event brought together the fiftieth anniversary of Gounod's writing of the work and the twentieth anniversary of his death. It deftly neutralized any reference to the Paris premiere. The opera was enhanced by familiar rituals of memorialization: the unveiling in Mistral's presence of a plaque outside Gounod's 1863 lodgings, and then the inauguration, by Mistral himself, of a bust of Gounod on the place des Armes. The following day (7 September) the poet attended the *Mireille* performance, presented in its original five acts for the first time since 1864. As we might expect, the press response split between a majority who applauded the Vallon de Saint-Clerc performance as a homecoming for Gounod and a newly vocal minority who believed the project doomed without the Mistral ballast, whatever the piquancy of the venue. Nevertheless, the event further bolstered Gounod's

72. Charles-Roux fulfilled the same organizational function for Mistral at Arles in 1909, as had Mariéton ten years earlier; Mistral called him his "supreme master" (*maître suprême*) of the festival's organization (letter of 7 April 1909 to Mme de Ferry, author of poetry used at the festival. Copies in Palais du Roure, Avignon, Correspondance de Frédéric Mistral, 1907–9. Charles-Roux does not clarify his role in his book-length account of the event, which is written as though by an enthusiastic spectator: *Le jubilé de Mistral* (1913).

reputation, with the Avignon and other Provençal heartland papers displaying a new warmth towards the work.

To an extent Marseille, too, responded positively. For Charles Varigny in the *Petit Provençal*, the “natural” reached its apotheosis.

No sets brought in; no artificial light; nature, and nature alone, in its grandeur and charm, provides an incomparable frame for this open-air stage backed against an immense peak of rock [see Fig. 8].

(Point de décors apprêtés: point d'éclairage artificiel: la nature, la nature seule, de son charme prestigieux, forme un cadre incomparable à cette scène de plein air qui est adossée à un immense rocher à pic.)<sup>73</sup>

Here was the antidote to the accusation that the work was full of interior stuffiness. Even in 1899 and 1909 it had been presented in a man-made space; here it was rendered elemental, arising from the natural surroundings with a realist directness perhaps only cinema would otherwise have been able to achieve. As Bernard Remacle put it in the *Soleil du Midi*, “the opening bars of the ravishing score arose, harmonious, into the azure calm, and it was spell-binding” (les premières mesures de la ravissante partition s'élèvent, harmonieuses, vers l'azur calme et c'est un enchantement.)<sup>74</sup> As in the case of previous festivals, where audience members had dressed in Provençal costume, commentators linked performers—who were not from Paris this time, but from a variety of regional theaters—and audience in a single body; as in previous festivals, the farandoleurs emerged as stars and were encored.

The critics who remained more royalist than the King and continued to disparage Gounod's work on purist grounds included those writing for Republican papers in Marseille—a fact worth dwelling on because of the tendency to see early twentieth-century regionalism as uniquely right-wing. The year 1913 did indeed see Gounod's *Mireille* applauded by Charles Maurras for the immense service of having “given the Provençal poem wing through music, [and] allowing it to vibrate on stages in Paris and worldwide,” ([e]n donnant au chant provençal l'aile de la musique, en lui permettant de vibrer sur les scènes de Paris et du monde); but it was in a Republican paper that the work's capacity to render that very service was held against it. Jean Barlatier, whose brother Paul directed the widely circulated *Sémaphore de Marseille*, wrote something of a hatchet-job *feuilleton* for it, also published as a pamphlet, that summed up previous tensions while shifting the ground such that he, writing from cosmopolitan Marseille, could speak with a voice whose Provençal authenticity matched the power of its regionalist appeal.<sup>75</sup> In short, to legitimate his critique he claimed that Marseille lay within the geographical boundaries of

73. Charles Varigny, *Petit Provençal*, 8 September 1913, 2.

74. *Le soleil du Midi*, 8 September 1913, 1.

75. The *feuilleton* consisted of a preparatory article by Sauveur Selon (*Sémaphore*, 10 Sep 1913), followed by Barlatier's three-installment piece (*ibid.*, 17–24 September 1913). The pamphlet contained a revised version of Selon's introduction followed by Barlatier's essay: *À propos*



**Figure 8** *Mirville*, Vallon de Saint-Clerc, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, 7 September 1913. Photographer unknown. Collection Palais du Roure, Avignon, “Dossier *Mirvèio*. Représentations et adaptations diverses.” Cited as from *Masilina*, September 1913.

heartland Provence and was just as Provençal in spirit.<sup>76</sup> Then followed an account of the work’s failure in Marseille in 1865 (including mention of how the *Sémaphore*’s founder Gustave Bénédict had prudently omitted devoting a *feuilleton* to it) and again in 1879 (which was inaccurate). By extension, success elsewhere in France and beyond was the work’s most damning feature:

This success, itself, is already more than an index, a testimony, of the manner in which Gounod’s work adapts itself to all sensibilities, and this despite different latitudes and the differences between races. Berliners like New Yorkers, Viennese like Londoners, Parisians like Marseillais, find in it something of their

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*du cinquantenaire de la “Mirville” de Ch. Gounod*. It was this essay that prompted Guieu to conclude that *Mirville* had no support whatsoever in the Midi. For information on the Barlatier brothers, see Combarrous, *Historique du Syndicat de la Presse*, 3–4, 16.

76. Barlatier, *À propos*, 16–17.

own sensibility. [. . .] Let no one tell me after that that the Provençal soul beats inside it. Our soul is at the very least different from that of others and does not let itself be so easily fathomed.

(Ce succès, lui-même, nous est déjà plus qu'un indice, un témoignage de la façon dont l'œuvre de Gounod s'adapte à toutes les compréhensions, à toutes les sensibilités et cela en dépit des différences de latitudes et des particularités de races. Les Berlinoises, comme les Newyorkais, les Viennoises comme les Londoniens, les Parisiens comme les Marseillais, retrouvent en elle quelque chose de leur sensibilité. [. . .] Que l'on ne vienne pas me dire après cela que l'âme provençale palpite en elle. Notre âme est au moins différente de celle des autres et ne se laisse pas aussi aisément pénétrer.)<sup>77</sup>

At this point the universality which Nestor Roqueplan had applauded in 1864 bit back at Gounod most harshly of all, in a nationalist and exceptionalist conceit which appeared to admit not the slightest inauthenticity or compromise in the interest of wider dissemination. Barlatier's vision did not outlaw musical setting of *Mirèio* so long as the musician in question possessed "genius and the ethnic soul necessary" (du génie et la race d'âme nécessaire) to understand and to translate Mistral's verses appropriately;<sup>78</sup> and neither did he put most of the blame on Gounod (Carré took the brunt). But his pamphlet remained an attempt to bury the opera as a protonational emblem because it could not match the localism of its model. The work's widespread appeal was bad enough; Gounod's apparent refusal to use folk melody in recognizable form despite Mistral's offer of source material and help from the Carpentras painter and scholar J.-J. Laurens was beyond the pale.<sup>79</sup> To invoke Leerssen once more, Gounod had been given the opportunity to write "national music," and had declined. For Barlatier, the very success of the 1913 farandoleurs indicated the direction he should have taken—a path only Bizet had apparently followed.<sup>80</sup>

## A Return to Arles: Authenticities of Utterance

Yet the Barlatier brothers, too, played out their own version of the duality whereby *Mireille* was the obvious *félibrige* opera and yet required adaptation to achieve acceptability. Paul Barlatier, who in addition to directing the *Sémaphore* ran Marseille's open-air theater, the Athéna-Niké, decided to close the season the following July with a fundraising performance of *Mireille* whose proceeds would go towards the erection of a monument to Mistral. Moreover, the puff inserted in the *Sémaphore* on the day of the performance applauded Gounod's work as a masterpiece. There was, however, a twist:

77. Ibid., 19–20.

78. Ibid., 24.

79. Ibid., 36, 41, 42–43.

80. Ibid., 43.

Thanks to the perfect translation into Provençal by MM. Pascal Cros and Jean Monné, the immortal masterpiece assumes unexpected charm. Gounod's delicious inspirations take on a new value in being developed over the supple rhythms of the Rhône dialect.

(L'immortel chef-d'œuvre revêt, grâce à la parfaite traduction en provençal de MM. Pascal Cros et Jean Monné, un charme imprévu. Les délicieuses inspirations de Gounod prennent une valeur nouvelle en se développant sur les rythmes souples du dialecte rhodanien.)<sup>81</sup>

The Cros/Monné venture represented arguably the final *Mireille*-related barrier to be broken down in the Midi: that of language. An experiment along these lines had already taken place at the Grand-Théâtre in Marseille in 1908 when a production of Alphonse Daudet's play *L'Arlésienne* was mounted in a Provençal translation by Jacques Martial, complete with Bizet's score. It was, said the same Sauveur Selon who would attack Gounod along with Jean Barlatier in 1913, a uniquely special theatrical moment when the audience of a city always full of visitors felt itself become a single collectivity. As at the *Mireille* festivals in the eyes of those who supported them, performers and audience became one: "We were evidently among Provençaux. Between the stage and the audience a current of sympathy established itself—one which we rarely experience." (Nous étions évidemment entre Provençaux. Il s'était établi entre la scène et la salle un courant de sympathie qu'on ne retrouve que rarement).<sup>82</sup> If the interpolation of folk and dance music within the opera indicated the direction in which Provençaux wanted Gounod's music to go, then this Marseillais experiment in translation did the same for the spoken and sung text of the *opéra comique*. For not only was the Pascal Cros translation used in Marseille on 11 July 1914 by local singers to fundraise for Mistral's monument, but it was reused the following day at the Arles Arena as part of the *félibrige Feste vièrginenco*.

Here, one might think, was the ultimate way to glue Gounod's work to the Provençal environment, inauthentic backdrops or not. At one extreme, the glue was unnecessary: an otherwise lyrically patriotic review in Arles's *L'homme de bronze* even disparaged the attempt to present the opera in a dialect (patois) rather than in its captivating "pure French language" (pure langue française)—a comment that fell short of accusing Cros of doing inauthentic violence to the opera but which indicated both the continuation of arguments as to whether and in what circumstances Provençal revival was desirable, and just how close to normality Gounod's opera had come in the Midi.<sup>83</sup> But among Provençal speakers the questions raised were different. The gesture of translation—of much greater political weight than the interpo-

81. *Sémaphore de Marseille*, 11 July 1914, 2. Unsigned.

82. *Ibid.*, 25 April 1908, 1.

83. L. Germain (*fils*) in *L'homme de bronze*, 19 July 1914, [1]. It should be noted however that Germain was not knowledgeable enough to recognize that the "patois" was wrong (see below): he called it "patois rhodanien." He was also writing in a regionalist but anti-*félibrige*



lation of folk dance or folksong at specific moments in the score, and instituted so soon after Mistral's death as to appear almost as a compensation for his absence—could never have been less than controversial. It brought yet more ironies of inauthenticity, first among them being that although Mistral had written *Mirèio* in Provençal in the first place, this presentation had to follow Carré's text. As the Republican *Quotidien du Midi* of Avignon put it, "There would be much to say on this adaptation, which frequently reproduces, to little effect, the weaknesses of the French libretto" (Il y aurait beaucoup à dire sur cette adaptation qui reproduit souvent, avec peu de bonheur, les faiblesses du libretto français); nevertheless, the quality of the performance made up for it, and in the view of this critic, Gounod's rather "sickly" (mièvre) music was energized anew in this alliance with "sinewy Provençal assonance" (aux nerveuses assonances provençales).<sup>84</sup> Yet the inauthenticity rankled. In the bilingual and Catholic *Croix d'Avignon* the use of Provençal was welcomed with open arms. "Say no more!" (N'en diguen pas mai!) wrote Bénézet Bruneau (*pseud.* Lou Barrulaire); but he then proceeded to an attack on how a work of genius was tampered with (mastroniado) by lesser men who "prettified his *Mirèio* with Frenchnesses" (en enjaubion sa *Mirèio* à la franchimando). He hoped for a competition to stage the work "with its original text, the pure *Mirèio* of the master" (dins son tèste ouriginau, la puro *Mirèio* dóu Mèstre), so that twelve million residents of the Midi could experience the poetry of their national work (Obro naciounalo).<sup>85</sup> In other words, he advocated the transformation of the epic poem into the play its author had consistently refused to authorize.

Yet there was a second reason why the Cros translation was only a partial success. It was in the wrong kind of Provençal. Contrary to the advertisement in the *Sémaphore* of 11 July, and the claims of the festival program itself, it appears that Cros, overseen by Monné, had breached the conditions by which Mme Mistral had authorized translation of the libretto: rather than a pure Rhône dialect, he had used the one from Marseille—the very dialect, ironically, that Mistral so disliked. For "E. F." in *La farandole* the problem was expressed as a doubt—a troubling suspicion of inauthenticity to be pushed aside in favor of celebrating any kind of Provençal translation; for Jean du Comtat in Montpellier the problem was real, and also political given the existence of a rift between Cros and Mistral himself, which had its roots in Cros's long-standing refusal to adopt the linguistic form Mistral advocated.<sup>86</sup> As a result, in Arles the Cros translation, far from creating the sense of wholeness of the 1908 *L'Arlatenco* in Marseille, appeared either distracting or created unattainable

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paper which viewed the Provençal language as doomed and which had in 1899 locked horns with the "royalist" Bourdet over the appropriateness of the Gounod opera.

84. Unsigned, *Quotidien du Midi* (Avignon), 17 July 1914, [1].

85. *Croix d'Avignon et du Comtat*, 19 July 1914, 1.

86. Jean du Comtat details the problem in *L'éclair de Montpellier*, 14 July 1914, 3.

expectations of purity. It illustrated how full acceptance of Gounod's opera now depended on increasingly slender subcategories of authenticity—all of them pushing the work towards parochialism of appearance and usage and giving it a fundamentally different physiognomy from the “universal” version offered on the municipal theater circuit. By extension it also suggested that while even the skeptical, such as the Barletier brothers, recognized the opera's necessity and lucrative potential as a vehicle for national celebration, it would always remain vulnerable to purist attack. A trenchant Jean du Comtat summed up: “Has the libretto's translation by the Marseille *félibre* Pascal Cros had the effect of giving at least a Provençal appearance to this work in which the Provençal character is absent? I fear not. . . .” (La traduction que M. Pascal Cros, félibre marseillais, a faite du livret, a-t-elle eu pour résultat de donner au moins une apparence provençale à cette œuvre sans caractère provençal? Je crains bien que non. . . .)<sup>87</sup>

### Bizet—“if only . . .”

At the end of the long nineteenth century, then, and with *Mireille* the opera a half century old, we are left with a relatively stable mode of reception in which it becomes a celebratory regionalist opera devoted to the cult of Mistral and the *Arlésienne*, but one that nevertheless provokes rumbles of discontent. Progressive attempts to naturalize it through adaptations of its music, dance, performed environment, and language attest to precisely the drive for cultural nationalism identified by Leerssen: in practical terms the work was rendered “local” and by extension “national” by every means possible. Yet the fundamental lack of its having been composed without specifically regionalist intent or perceived ethnographic sensitivity became a running sore made worse by the perception, in the Midi, that things might have been otherwise.

Despite its success in terms of audience numbers, *Mireille* at the turn of the century seemed to be a constant reminder of an absence: a successful opera on Provençal subject matter, based on Mistral, involving his collaboration, and written on Provençal, rather than Parisian, terms—which included using the folksongs Mistral routinely provided to those with whom he started work on an opera. It might have happened with Henri Maréchal's *Calendal* of 1894; but the work never really took off. And Charles Marie Widor's *Nerto*, also based on Mistral, was not completed until a decade after the poet's death. Furthermore, local opera composers such as Félicien David (born in Cadenet), or Ernest Reyser (from Marseille) had shown no interest in Mistral's regionalism. The much younger Languedoc composer Déodat de Séverac, whose spectaculars were featured at nearby Béziers, met Mistral (whom he admired) in 1905, but there appears to be no sign of a joint project. There was,

87. Ibid.

however, another Frenchman who would have written the ideal *Mireille* and whose untimely demise is keenly lamented among *Mireille* critics of the Midi: Bizet. His was the projected *Calendal* to which Mistral agreed in 1869—abandoned for reasons unknown, but probably not unconnected with the upheaval of the Franco-Prussian War.<sup>88</sup> His music featured prominently in the last *Mireille* festival I discuss here: for at Arles in 1914 the arrival of the mayor of Arles and Marguerite Priolo, Queen of the Félibrige, was heralded not by the customary *Marseillaise* but by an orchestral version of the Provençal carol the *Marcho di Rèi*. By longstanding tradition it was a tune used at Epiphany—notably at the cathedral in Aix-en-Provence—as processional music for the entrance of the Magi. The tune was also associated with the annual *félibrige* meeting known as the Sainte-Estelle/Étoile (Santo-Estello), which is still held in a different Provençal town each year. And alongside two other folksongs supplied via Daudet, it featured prominently in Bizet's music to *L'Arlésienne*.<sup>89</sup> Now, in Arles, it prefaced Gounod's *Mireille* as an anthem for *félibrige* royalty. Its use in 1914 was emblematic of the preference I detect in asides and allusions right through the post-1872 reception of *Mireille*, and of which the eternal patchwork jobs aimed at boosting its authenticity act as symptoms: Gounod was second best. What the Provençaux really wanted was a *Mireille* from his protégé.

The difference would seem to lie in medium rather than message or even provenance. Both composers were outsiders to Provence, and neither would have written a manifesto to partner Mistral's poem. Both would have caused the asymmetry of authorial identity and intention that rendered Gounod an easy target for the simple reason that he did not belong. Returning to Guieu's recent analysis is useful here, since it demonstrates just how many more Provençal folksongs Gounod's five-act and three-act versions of *Mireille* contained than Gounod's *méridional* contemporaries recognized. He cites the following folk material: (1) the 6/8 farandole of the Overture (as distinct from the act 2 "Farandole" in 4/4); (2) the last four bars of the Overture (quoting "Dins lou Soleù de Prouvenço" [In the Provençal Sun]); and (3) the musette preceding Andreolux's "Le jour se lève" (original: "Lou Roumavàgi" [The Pilgrimage]).<sup>90</sup> Implicitly, Guieu also illustrates that Bizet's *L'Arlésienne*

88. Lacombe, *Georges Bizet*, 464–67.

89. Bizet himself identified three folksongs, all of which he took not from Saboly/Seguin but from the collection of tunes at the end of François Vidal's gaboulet and tambourin method *Lou tambourin*. He used them in Nos. 1, 23, 24 (the *Marcho dei Rèi*); 13 (*Èr dou Guet/Watchman's Air*); and 22 23 (*Danso dei Chivau-Frus/Dance of the Frisky Horses*) of his score. See Lacombe, "Introduction" to Bizet, *L'Arlésienne*, 17 (the movement numbers above amend the incorrect labelling in this introduction).

90. Interestingly, and perhaps because of its Catholic identity, Guieu does not mention the single tune identified by d'Ortigue in 1864: the act 5 processional based on the "Cantique de San-Gen." Neither does he note the structural similarity between Gounod's "Magali" duet and "Bouenjour, lou roussignou."

was no richer in folksong usage than Gounod's opera. A glance back at Mistral's original text is also illuminating for its bilingual presentation on facing pages, allowing the reader to move at will from the national (Provençal) to the international/universal (French) and back again. Indeed, this notion of parallel visions is, perhaps, our best entry point to the discomfiture of regionalist Provençaux in the face of Gounod's "universalizing" score.

Provençal audiences failed to recognize Gounod's folk borrowings arguably because they were not presented as parallel visions *à la* Mistral, but in an assimilated form where focus on melodic contour was supplanted by the evocation of a more generalized folk-like soundscape. To invoke Leerssen, on exiting the "salvage, retrieval and inventory" phase, Gounod's folk references would need to have formed a musical counterpart to his category of "Rustic-realist literature"—the "restorative phase"—before proceeding further. When Jean Barlatier berated Gounod over the "Chanson de Magali" he expressed his complaint in precisely such terms: if Gounod had introduced the melody into the work, it was "only to render it unrecognizable, so much did he distort it" (*ce ne fut que pour la rendre méconnaissable, tant il l'a déformée*).<sup>91</sup> If only he had included folksongs—by which he meant melodically unadulterated ones—they could have brought to it "that Provençal character which it entirely lacks" (*ce caractère provençal qui lui manque totalement*).<sup>92</sup> It is telling in this regard that when folk elements were added to Gounod's opera from 1899, they caused obvious stylistic disjuncture and an increase in rustic realism that bolstered the aural with the visual. They drew attention to themselves as a particular kind of diegetic music. Traditional costume and dance, combined with a new instrumentational sound-world, ring-fenced the farandole in its own, "national," space. The impression was then reinforced in 1899 with the Provençal "Magali," which abandoned the standard symphony orchestra and foregrounded the solo ballad singer. Mistral, through the "real" farandole, and Jane Marignan, through her sung tribute to the poet himself, re-created the reader's experience of the original biligual text. Seen in this light it would seem that it was Bizet's recognition in *L'Arlésienne* that discrete sound-worlds could be juxtaposed or overlaid, so long as they remained both recognizable and distinct, that rendered him the opera composer for whom purist regionalist Provençal commentators longed. His three folksongs—fewer than appear in *Mireille*—are presented intact, though not unaltered. Moreover, not only does Bizet identify the melodies and use the *Marcho di Rèi* prominently as the opening theme of the overture, but on its return in act 3 the march appears, sung to its original text (in French translation) as diegetic

91. Barlatier, *À propos*, 44. He was almost certainly referring to Mistral's preferred tune, rather than its poetic model (whose music Gounod follows much more directly).

92. *Ibid.*, 43. Implicitly, d'Ortigue had put the point even more strongly, in that his noting of the "strange rhythm" in the "Chanson de Magali" in 1864 (cited above) suggested that the only compositional parameter that counted towards recognition was the melodic line.

processional music in two of the play's offstage choruses.<sup>93</sup> On its first choral appearance (No. 23), Bizet prefaces the march with the score's main "farandole" music (No. 22), based on another Provençal air, the *Danso dei Chivau-Frus* (Dance of the Frisky Horses). Then, the timpanist having moved to the wings to become an offstage tambourin player, he interleaves the two melodies and finally layers the folk-based "farandole" over the march.<sup>94</sup> This sequence of folkloric citation, one of the play's longest uninterrupted musical expanses, creates a poignantly realist, celebratory, and national backdrop to the private turmoil of the play's central character Frédéri, who, his dreams of marriage shattered, is about to commit suicide. On a more general musical level, however, to local onlookers of the late nineteenth century the play seems to have pointed up the cruel irony of the pairing of the wrong composer with the wrong literary stimulus. It demonstrated that only Bizet could have turned Mistral's Mirèio into a national operatic heroine—a "natural," "true," and even "authentic," Arlésienne.

The story of *Mireille* in its festival guise focuses our attention on the tension between local character and the ability to communicate across borders that is inherent in works representing the cultural nationalism of emerging nations—even those which, like Provence, demand cultural recognition and respect as an end in itself, rather than as a step towards political autonomy. The various forms of resistance to Gounod's *Mireille* in the Midi are striking for their increasingly purist benchmarks and because at the margins they persisted despite Mistral's own input, his imprimatur, and associated *félibrige* press support. What happened in 1914 regarding dialect purism could suggest the futility of a parochial nationalism that reaches a vanishing point by becoming so exclusive as to be self-defeating, and strikingly distant from the universalizing claims made for Mistral's original as "Homeric." It could also indicate a society anxious to define a mainstream for itself before it can afford to accept hybrids, satellite phenomena, or variants, even when they might make for more effective outreach. The latter seems to apply to Gounod's folksong treatment and the contrasting ideal Bizet was held to represent—which is itself ironic given that in 1872 Bizet, for his part, had been accused of adulterating folksong in *L'Arlésienne*.<sup>95</sup> Neither Gounod nor Bizet had worked to a brief in which regionalist imperatives dictated they create a museum exhibit in sound, but by creating a new function for *Mireille* in the context of a multifaceted nationalist campaign, Mistral elevated ethnographic accuracy to a necessary condition.

93. Bizet, *L'Arlésienne*, 194–200.

94. And yet for all its salience as a "national" piece, *L'Arlésienne*'s international success would have presented Barlatier with an uncomfortable riposte to his claim that *Mireille*'s widespread acceptance outside the Midi logically precluded its possession of a Provençal soul.

95. Editorial note to letter from Mistral to Daudet, 4 November 1872, in Bornecque, *Histoire d'une amitié*, 164.

Gounod's practice was, however, manifestly less melody-centered than Bizet's, and hence less suitable for regionalist appropriation. Even when adapted and buttressed by other nationalist associations, his opera was never—quite—embraced as an example of what Leerssen would call “national music.”

*Mireille*, then, was not an outright failure as Mistral's manifesto opera in the turn-of-the-century Midi; but it was never a perfect fit. As is graphically illustrated by the numerous programs in the archives of the Midi, it endured for much of the twentieth century as an occasional work dusted off to celebrate local identity, most notoriously in Arles when the 28 June 1941 charity revival at the Théâtre Antique, in aid of the Secours National, was broadcast uncut on Radio-Vichy (alongside *L'Arlésienne*). As a festival work its position in 2009—the sesquicentennial anniversary of Mistral's poem—was both similar and dissimilar to that of a century or so before. “L'Année *Mireille*” abounded in events using the opera as visual and sonic contrast to the poem. Paris contributed via an exhibition at the Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra and the first-ever performance of Gounod's *Mireille* at the Palais Garnier, which attracted derision among my interlocutors in the Midi for the inauthenticity of its costumes and its Alsatian-looking heroine (the blonde, plaited, Inva Mula). The previous May, new municipal-theater productions in Tours (avoiding local references) and Marseille (adopting them) enhanced the opera's more general exposure in France, but the Marseille production was repeated in Midi-festival vein only a year later, as part of the open-air Chorégies at the Théâtre Antique in Orange, in August 2010. The 2009 Santo-Estello at Salon-de-Provence indicated continuing official recognition of the opera despite the marginality of the genre *per se* to contemporary French audiences; it mounted a new spectacle by Jacques Bertrand entitled “De *Mirèio* à *Mireille*,” incorporating some of Gounod's music. However, the festival's culmination was Mistral's *Mireille* as a modern drama for two actors and narrator, devised by Gérard Gelas for his Avignon-based Théâtre du Chêne Noir. Meanwhile Arles celebrated its local hero in largely traditional style. The high point of the summer festivities was undoubtedly 5 July, which brought together the passing through of the Tour de France, the Cocarde d'Or bullfight (preceded in the Arena by a tribute to Mistral in the form of costumed folk dancing by Arlésiennes), and the Fête de la Costume in which hundreds of women processed to the traditional annual ceremony at the Théâtre Antique. Walking tours, lectures, newly choreographed ballets, and a “Bal *Mireille*” completed the picture. Nevertheless, where the opera was concerned Arles turned centralist. In a gesture that spoke as much of absence as of presence, and which recalls yet again that “missing” cell in the Leerssen matrix, the Arles municipal newsletter simply headlined the fact that on 14 September, 1.1 million viewers had watched Gounod's *Mireille* on France 3—broadcast from the Palais Garnier in Paris.<sup>96</sup>

96. *Arles-Info*, no. 135 (October 2009): 2. The Marseille production by Robert Fortune, which would have been much more to Midi taste, was not recorded for broadcast.

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## Abstract

In 1899, six years after Gounod's death, his Provençal opera *Mireille* (1864) suddenly became a focal point for regionalist celebration and debate in the



South of France. It also, in a paradoxical sense, came “home” to Arles—a town that the original poem’s author, Frédéric Mistral, made clear his heroine had never visited. In this article the resulting invented tradition, which began thirty-five years after the opera’s Paris premiere and rested on standard notions of authenticity and belonging, is contextualized by reference to the very different life it led in the Midi as a standard “municipal” opera sent out, after significant revision, from Paris. Joep Leerssen’s theory of cultural nationalism provides a frame for analyzing how and why this opera, which set a regionalist manifesto to music but was not a manifesto itself, could be only incompletely appropriated by Mistral and his *félîtres* as an emblematic “national” work.

Keywords: France, regionalism, opera, Gounod, Mistral